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People's History: The Story of Hartford Areas Rally Together 1995

People's History



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“There are just
so many folks
who have had
such an impact
on our city
and they may not
even realize it.”

—Peg Stewart

1995 HART President

Cover photo of HART leaders by Christine Breslin, 1988.

People's History: The Story of Hartford Areas Rally Together published in 1995. © 1995 by Hartford Areas Rally Together. For copies of this book or more information, call HART at 860-525-3449, or write to: 660 Park Street, Hartford, CT, 06106.

Background of HART History Project

The purpose of this publication is to chronicle the people and events that led to the creation of HART in 1975, and the resulting actions that have redefined power and politics in Hartford neighborhoods over the past twenty years. The following narrative is largely an oral history of these events and less of an analysis, although an effort is made to highlight significant themes and tactics common to HART's approach to 'community organizing'. It is hoped that readers of this text today and tomorrow will develop a more significant understanding and appreciation of the importance of working to involve community residents in decisions that impact on their lives and neighborhoods.

Over the past three years more than 7000 newsclippings, flyers, photos, and other pages of material have been dusted off, sorted and read through. Seventy interviews were conducted over a five month period in the Winter and Spring of 1995 spearheaded by David Radcliffe with support from Reina Koistinen, Beatrice Birdman, Jim Boucher, Ana Natal, Peg Stewart, Hyacinth Yenni, Nancy Galarza, and Dulcie Giadone. Those interviews were then transcribed onto computer disk by the University of Connecticut School of Oral History's Michele Palmer. Choice bits were removed from the transcriptions and merged with other materials, including some terrific photos courtesy Penny Rusnak of the Hartford Public Library, Lee Paquette and Earl Dotter through the Center for Community Change.

Also included are stories recorded from a June 10, 1995 weekend of 'community organizing legends'. Thanks to the legends for participating in that most remarkable weekend: Jack Mimnaugh, Shel Trapp, Tom Gaudette, Dave Beckwith, Henry Shelton, Stan Holt, and Renee Martin. Editing and narrative improvement credits belong to David Radcliffe, Jennifer Van Campen, Jack Mimnaugh, Alta Lash, John McKenna, Jim Boucher, Lee Paquette, David McKinley, Mike Allison, Ramonita Ortiz, Flora Long, Michael Menatian, Jane Murphy, Mike Smith and a host of sharp-eyed others. Thanks go to Brigitte Poulin for the 'footprints' idea used throughout the book.

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Recorded and transcribed interviews and sources for the stories that follow are available for review at the HART office at 660 Park Street. A copy of this book can be obtained from HART, or borrowed from the Hartford Public Library (main and all branches) and the University of Connecticut School of Urban Studies. For safety and longevity, many of the boxes of files used as sources for much of this book are now kept and available to urban scientists and social changers at UCONN.

For every one person and neighborhood issue mentioned in the pages that follow, there are one hundred others who are not.

HART in Hartford

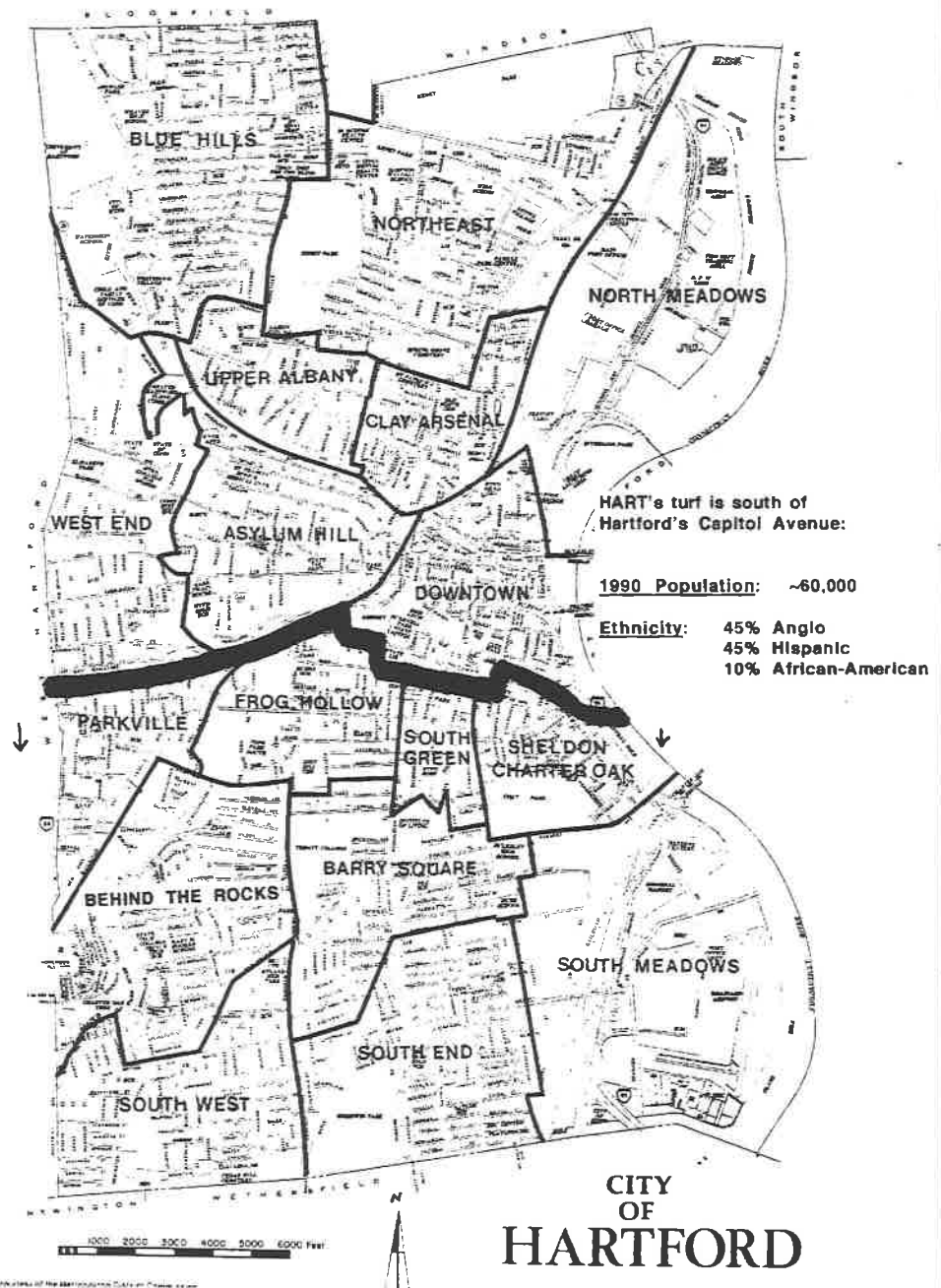


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Introduction

During a fight to preserve a critical tax break for Hartford homeowners, noted a 1981 *Southside News* article, Hartford Area Rally Together (HART) member Roger Brisson put on a rubber mask, dressed in a business suit and carried a briefcase stuffed with play money. As "C.C. Moneybags" he strolled across the floor of the State Legislature, mocking unamused Chamber of Commerce developers who were opposed to the tax bill.

Other members of HART have literally pounded bricks at City Hall, closed Lafayette Circle to protest traffic congestion, moved furniture into city hall meeting to 'convert' it into housing, presented dead rats to absentee landlords, sold apples to protest high taxes, unleashed a roll of petitions from a City hall balcony, and conducted a 'funeral' at an intersection considered dangerous. In twenty years hundreds of protests, rallies, and marches have been held in our neighborhoods, at City Hall and in downtown. Through it all, HART has survived to become the oldest organization of its type in New England. In the process of rebuilding the physical and social community HART has reshaped the political culture of Hartford. As many of those interviewed observed, decisions of major economic or social consequences can not be made without the involvement of HART and neighborhood people. [132]

According to the HART constitution, the purpose of HART is to 'unite all people within its boundaries in an organization that will help equip people with the skills and expertise needed to effectively address issues and provide a structure through which people can define and act upon common problems'. The following stories document some of the extraordinary people and events who have helped HART stay true to this mission, twenty years down the road.

What is 'Community Organizing'?

"In the world as it is, man moves primarily because of self interest."

— Saul Alinsky

HART's approach to addressing community problems and building neighborhood power is called community organizing. Other approaches that community groups use include advocacy (legal services), service delivery (social work) or development (builds something, such as Broad Park Development or El Hogar del Futuro in Hartford). Some organizations, according to David Beckwith of the Center for Community Change, use more than one of these strategies.

There are a number of groups in Hartford who define their activities in the area of 'community organizing'. HART's central focus as a community organization does not include the delivery of direct services. Several agencies and groups in Hartford involve citizens in an advising capacity for the delivery of services. However, all decisions made within HART and any public comments are made by people in the neighborhoods, not by staff or executive directors. [83]

Organizing is a process of building power through involving a diverse group of people to identify shared, specific, winnable problems and desired solutions. These problems are called issues.

While a single issue may bring together a number of people, each person's reason for wanting to take action for community change is often very different. This 'self-interest' is an important motivation for people to become involved in groups like HART. People get involved, writes Beckwith, for two reasons. First, they see a potential for either benefit or harm to themselves if the group succeeds or fails. Second, they see that their personal involvement has an impact on the whole effort.

After identifying or 'cutting' the issue to its simplest form, the people and structures that can make those solutions possible are identified. Negotiation, action and often confrontation and pressure are used to bring about a solution.

Footprints: David McKinley, former HART Director, On Confrontation

"The criticisms of the tactics, I always felt, were a way for city powers to try to divert the issue. Instead of really listening to what neighborhood people were saying, they would say, 'Well, it's really HART organizers trying to stir up trouble,' but that's really not the feeling of the neighborhood people. No organizer in the world is capable of getting five hundred people out on a cold winter night to deal with the property taxes. Issues are real, and yes, the organizers were always very active, and talking to a lot of people, and providing a lot of support. But the criticisms of the confrontational tactics is as old as organizing, and it's really, I think, an argument by the powers-that-be to really divert the issue somehow — you know, 'We can't deal with you.' We would have never had to be confrontational if the powers would listen to us and take our concerns seriously from the beginning. But the confrontation was not some preferred way of dealing with people. It was the only way to get them to take you seriously. People's first inclination was not, 'Let's go picket.' Everyone's first inclination is, 'Well, let's talk to them.' It was only tactics that involved picketing and picking up garbage and taking it down to the landlord's house in Middletown, and dumping it on his lawn there. And that was not people's first step. That was always two, three, four, fifth step. I always felt that the criticism of the confrontation tactics was irrelevant. It tried to discredit the real meat of what was going on." [206]

An organization needs concrete, measurable 'wins' on issues for those who participate, or the group will not last long. Winning and action, said one community organizer, provide the 'oxygen' that keeps organizing alive and thriving.

With community organizing, paid staff roles are limited to helping volunteer leaders become effective, to guiding leaders through the process and helping create the mechanism for the group to speak and take action on their own behalf.

The philosophy of HART has been that the paid community organizer is to help people join together so that the people can define problems and ways to resolve them. Organizers stay in the background, with the neighborhood people running the meetings and speaking for themselves. [49] A December 1975 *Hartford Courant* article wrote about the 'behind the scenes' role of an organizer: "So unobtrusive that he seemed to have wandered into the meeting by mistake, HART community organizer Jack Mimnaugh sat at the rear of the room while angry South End residents grilled a Recreation Superin-

tendent Al Gatta to provide hoops, dance, and other programs." [45]

Michael Gorzoch, early HART community organizer: "Organizers still have to build a relationship with leaders, they still have to respond to the leader, they still have to provide the best information possible for the leader, they still have to work with the leader, in terms of pros and cons, and how to do things. That hasn't changed. That is still the basic responsibilities for organizers, to have those skills, and to make sure that their leader is the best possible prepared person that they can be when walking into a meeting." [196]

Roots of Community Organizing: Saul Alinsky

"I don't think anybody can say today they are organizing and not in some shape or form trace their roots to Alinsky".

— Shel Trapp, an organizer with the Chicago-based 'National Training and Information Center'

Community organizing traces its roots to the industrial labor union organizing in the United States of the early 1900's. John L. Lewis, the union organizing giant and creator of the United Mine Workers, United Auto Workers, and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), was also a leading influence on the life and work of a man named Saul Alinsky.

Alinsky was born in 1909 in Chicago's west side. He began to develop what came to be called community organizing in the late 1930's after a short career in criminology, which included a study of Al Capone's gangsters. Observing Lewis' tactics, Alinsky began playing with the idea of 'organizing' a community. His first organizing work was in Chicago's 'Back of the Yards' neighborhood. Early successes here encouraged Alinsky to try replicating the process in other cities.

In 1940 Alinsky started a training school for community organizers called the 'Industrial Areas Foundation' (IAF). While many organizers came through IAF, just as many learned organizing 'in the field', with very little formal instruction. Some of the first generation of community organizers included Tom Gaudette, Ed Chambers, Fred Ross and Nick Von Hoffman. This cadre of social change artists in turn created dozens of community organizations and influenced numerous other organizers, including United Farm Worker founder Cesar Chavez, San Antonio's Ernie Cortez, Chicago's Shel Trapp, Stan Holt who directed 'People Acting Through Community Effort' in Providence, Rhode Island, and Jack Mimnaugh, who would later become the first director of HART in 1975. Community organizing gained additional momentum as a method of improving cities and developing leadership through Alinsky's publications 'Reveille for Radicals' (1946) and 'Rules for Radicals' (1972).

Alinsky loved to embarrass the power structure. One of the many often told examples of his tactical creativity came in Rochester, New York in the 1960's. The story was captured in a book on the life and work of Alinsky by Sanford Horwitt. A group of poor blacks were organizing in Rochester, and could not get the attention of the 'smug, self-righteous establishment', including the area's largest employer, Kodak. Alinsky suggested that they should purchase a large bloc of tickets to a performance of the Rochester symphony but, before arriving, they should all get together for a huge baked-bean dinner so once at the concert, their 'presence could not be ignored'. Fearing public embarrassment, Kodak agreed to meet with

the group prior to the symphony.

One of Alinsky's early organizers was Tom Gaudette. Up until 1966, Gaudette had been vice president of Admiral Corporation, a maker of industrial products. For some time Gaudette had been tempted by the idea of a career in organizing as he had become more involved in community affairs in the West Side of Chicago as early as 1961. Alinsky heard of Gaudette's work, and asked to meet him. Alinsky challenged Gaudette's interest in organizing, saying, 'You're too old for organizing career, you're past your peak and shouldn't be out at night.' Daring Gaudette, Alinsky said, 'if you really want to organize, you'll pick up the phone and quit your job.' This is just what Gaudette did.

Gaudette:

"Saul was a simple person, not the complicated, mean, tough human being that people described. His concern was, 'How the hell do we get people to participate in their lives and the government? If we don't we will lose.'"

Today, Gaudette says that "Organizing is like a wonderful meal. It has kept me alive to see people do things for themselves. I came out of business, which can be the duller experience for a human being. I have no particular skills like music or art, so I was excited to find that there were things I could do by organizing people."

In 1966 Gaudette worked with former Presbyterian minister and civil rights worker Stan Holt and former Methodist minister Shel Trapp to start the 'Organization for a Better Austin' (OBA, in Chicago). Gale Cincotta was one of their first and strongest neighborhood leaders, and she soon became president of OBA.

In March 1972 OBA, under the direction of Trapp, helped pull together other community organizations for a nationwide meeting that created groups called National People's Action (NPA) and the National Training and Information Center (NTIC), still run in 1995 by Cincotta and Trapp. With all of its groups and activities Chicago quickly came to be regarded as the 'Harvard of organizing'.

As civil rights riots and Vietnam War protests tore across the country in the late 1960's, community organizing bubbled vigorously in Chicago neighborhoods and elsewhere in the mid-west. At the same time, a handful of people in New England were being exposed to organizing through their work with the church. These people were soon drawn to Chicago, a linkage that would bring Alinsky-style organizing to New England, including Hartford, for the very first time. A pioneer in this effort was Henry Shelton of Providence, Rhode Island.

Early Community Organizing in New England

"Go where the anger is."

— Tom Gaudette

"The more people raise hell, the more they get. The quieter they are, the more they step on you."

— Henry Shelton

In 1966, Henry Shelton, a Catholic priest, became the Director of the Catholic Inner-City Apostolate for the Diocese of Providence, Rhode Island.

Shelton:

"We had a storefront on Prairie Avenue, right near St. Michael's Church, where Jack Mimnaugh (who would later become the first director of HART in 1975) used to preach.

"My job was to find out what some of the ways the church could be more helpful in helping low income people. I started off really by listening. The storefront was very accessible. It was right in a low income area in Providence, and people started dropping in. Most of their problems were welfare-type problems. You know, ran out of food, ran out of rent. I ended up going down there — sometimes four or five times a day — with individual recipients. Then, a few months later I get a letter from Monsignor Jack Egan (an associate of Alinsky) in Chicago. He was putting together a meeting of inner-city priests at the time in a conference in Chicago, and it was by an organizer working with Alinsky named Tom Gaudette. It was the first, really, I had heard about organizing. I didn't have it in school. I didn't read anything about it. So I went to Chicago and met with Gaudette privately after the meeting."

First Alinsky-style 'Action' in New England

Shelton:

"I said to Gaudette, 'That organizing stuff sounds interesting. Do you think we could do some of it right here in Providence?' Gaudette said, 'Well, what do you do now?' So I described the day and my life, and he was pretty sarcastic about it. It was dramatic to me. He said, 'At the end of the day, Reverend, do you feel good when you kneel down to say your prayers?' I said, 'Well, I guess I feel okay.' He said, 'You feel like you helped a lot of people? Seven or eight maybe, every day, at least?' I said, 'Yes, probably.' He said, 'Well, how do you think the mothers on welfare feel, when they say their prayers at the end of the day?' I said, 'Gee, I don't know.' He said, 'Well, do you think they may feel like they now depend on two people, a professional social worker and a clerical social worker? How do you think that makes an individual person feel to have

to depend doubly on the people?' I said, 'I guess not so good.' He said, 'That's right.' I said, 'Well, can you show me a better way?' He said, 'Yes. When are you going back?' I said, 'Well, I'll go back Monday.' He said, 'When you go back and the first woman comes in, what do you do, give her a cup of coffee?' I said, 'Yes, anyone can come and get a cup of coffee.' He said, 'Sit down with her for a minute and just say, 'Look, I went to this meeting in Chicago and I met these crazy folks, and they said you should do it a different way. There's a better way to do it than the way we do it now.' Tell her you're going to have a meeting that afternoon at two o'clock, so you won't keep her waiting. It may be a serious problem. Those kids have no food. And if she's really desperate, she'll come back at two. And for each person that comes in — say there's three or four or five — whatever number comes in — have them elect a chairperson/spokesperson. Even if they've never done it before.' And he said, 'Then have them tell each story to the other person — tell their stories.' And then he said, 'Then you can still do what you normally do. You can get in your car and go down to the office. Before you go, though, make them pledge to each other no one leaves the office until everyone gets served. Whatever they need. And they won't leave until everyone gets served, and you stay quiet. Just be their supporter'.

"There were about five or six other people. We went down, and to my surprise — a couple of women went up to the front. They listed all the problems, and they said, 'We're not leaving until everyone gets what they need.' And the social worker got very nervous. And it worked. I couldn't believe it!"

The First Alinsky-style Community Organization in New England: 'People Acting through Community Effort' (PACE)

Shelton:

"This was 1969, or somewhere in there. Neighborhood organizing was always in the back of my mind because of Tom Gaudette. So we had a group of clergy in South Providence, Rhode Island, and we met religiously every Friday morning for coffee and donuts. I was there for over five years, and we might have missed one or two because of big storms. We started talking about the neighborhood we were living in, and the slum landlords, and all that stuff. I said, 'Well, I met an organizing guy in Chicago who told me that there are some people around who can do some of that good neighborhood stuff.' But these organizers want to get paid. They're very clear on how much they want. They won't come in without a guarantee. So we set-up a committee — like a sponsoring committee. Finally, I talked to the Bishop McVinney and the Protestant ministers talked to him, and the churches in our area decided that we wanted to put a neighborhood organization together.

"So I went out to Chicago, met my friend Tom Gaudette again. I said, 'Look, do you have any organizers available?' He said, 'Yes, we actually got one that might want to come to Rhode Island if the price is right, and you guys back him up.' It was Stan Holt. He had worked

along with Shel Trapp in the West End of Chicago (with the 'Organization for a Better Austin'). They had a Class A staff.

"When I was in Chicago they took me to a neighborhood meeting, where Gaudette said, 'Look, I'm going to show you what an organizer's role is. We're going to bring in ten landlords tomorrow. We're going to beat the hell out of them.' He said, 'During the meeting, all I'm going to do is serve coffee.' I thought, 'That's not true. He's going to be all over the place, if he's going to bring ten landlords in.' A lot of people — it was in a Catholic church basement, and it was a big hall. They had about nine landlords that showed up. And they brought them in one at a time. They had them in this other room, and they all signed agreements. One guy didn't show up and I said to myself, 'Gee, this guy is smart. He didn't come.' I said to Gaudette, 'He's very smart, huh? He didn't come.' He said, 'He's not smart. You watch what's going to happen.' So they had the bus ready, and this landlord had a hardware store downtown. They get on the bus and go right down to his hardware store — right in. He signs the agreement right away — they got the signs out and were marching in front of the hardware store, which was busy in those days. I was very impressed.

"So Stan and I go back to the Bishop in Rhode Island and asked for support for three years, ninety thousand dollars. The Bishop said he'd go for thirty, but Stan was tough. He said, 'No, we need ninety. Got to have the money in the bank. That's what we need.' Now, the Episcopalists in the other churches were willing to put up five thousand of that. So after some convincing we got the eighty-five.

"The group we created was called PACE, People Acting in Community Effort. The first director was Stan Holt. Howie Brown, Renne Martin, Larry Gordon and David Beckwith were some of the early PACE organizers. The office was open almost around the clock. You know, like the Alinsky style, staff meetings were held from ten at night until three-thirty in the morning. I'd come in in the morning, and there would be college students bodies on the floor. [laughs] Students who slept — they get out of the staff meeting at two, and figure, 'What the hell? I'll just stay here.' The office was tremendously alive. And it was like a feeding ground. And they helped each other. Just the spirit. Competitive, but at the same time supportive". [224] Those staff meetings, recalls Stan Holt, "allowed us to peel away the layers of a problem to reveal the true issue that we'd take action on."

Community Organizing Spreads

"Never say something will not work."

— Shel Trapp

With the growth and success of PACE in Rhode Island, other New England cities asked for support to begin similar community building efforts. As a result an organization called the New England Training Center for Community Organizers (NETCCO) was created by the first PACE director Stan Holt and Howie Brown.

Brown took over for Holt as PACE director and for a time was also the part-time director at NETCCO. NETCCO provided technical assistance to other cities interested in organizing. NETCCO's first full-time director was David Beckwith in 1974. (While an organizer at PACE, Beckwith led, among other things a short-lived boycott of a locally made beer. He is now a neighborhood consultant with the Washington-based Center for Community Change).

Beckwith:

"Stan Holt had a number of meetings with clergy from around New England, in connection with the original proposal for the training center, selling the idea of organizing, and there were some contacts between priests from the Diocese in Rhode Island, where there was an active organizing base, who were selling the idea of organizing around the region. And that was the genesis of the training center, to meet the needs of those local teams of clergy around New England who wanted to see organizing brought to their town." [203]

At the time PACE existed in Providence, there were several other groups trying to get started in New England. One was in Springfield, called 'Springfield Project for United Neighbors' (SPUN). There was another called 'Somerville United Neighbors' (SUN), just north of Boston. 'Massachusetts Fair Share' and the Connecticut Citizen Action Group (CCAG) were also starting in those years. Beyond these efforts and several President Lyndon Johnson sponsored anti-poverty programs like 'Model Cities', there was no Alinsky-style community organizing taking place in Connecticut. [205]

Hartford before HART: 1960 to 1973

Rise of the Chamber of Commerce

After World War II business leadership in Hartford wanted an end to old-style machine politics, and backed a successful revision of the city's charter that established a weak mayor and council-manager form of government. Later, a surge in local business made the Chamber of Commerce a huge force in local public policy, and in 1955 they hired a strong executive director, Arthur Lumsden. In an interview from the 1960's, Hartford architect Jack Dollard described Lumsden's role:

"It seemed to me like there was a city over here, and over there, across a moat, there was a castle where the companies were. Every once in a while we in the city would need something, and it would be like shouting across the moat. The drawbridge would then come down, and Lumsden would come out. We would talk, and he would go back, and then after a while he'd come back with something."

Lumsden successfully insulated the Chief Executive Officers of Hartford corporations from any local activists and even public officials. The Chamber came to dominate the Hartford City Council and all local politics. Even the Democratic Town Committee was largely funded and controlled by the Chamber, right down to deciding who would run for what office. All decisions were made behind closed doors.

During Lumsden's tenure Hartford witnessed something of an urban renewal. Travelers Insurance Company had considered moving, but stayed in the city and built Constitution Plaza in the 1950's. This decimated the 'Little Italy' neighborhood that was there, displacing hundreds of families. Aetna Insurance also decided to remain in Hartford, and became a major backer of the Civic Center which was built in the early 1970's.

Community "Action": Sympathy, Not Solutions

Throughout the 1960's the Chamber of Commerce promoted a number of approaches to deal with poor city residents, and later in the decade, with the unrest that shook Hartford.

In 1962, Lumsden pushed for the creation of the Community Renewal Team (CRT) in north Hartford. This response provided direct social services, such as meals or other 'daily living' support.

From 1967 to 1971 riots, arson, and violent confrontations with police, as in a number of other cities across the country because of Civil Rights and the Vietnam War, occurred in north Hartford. Examples of the turmoil in Hartford come from newspaper headlines:

'Police use tear gas to disperse looters in North End and downtown area'
'Several buildings set on fire'
'Police car hit by sniper fire'

*'Newspaper reporters abandon cars to flee from attackers'
'Firebombing incidents. Rock throwing. 35 arrested'*

One Chamber-created response to this social upheaval was 'South Arsenal Neighborhood Development' (SAND). SAND focused on housing, community facilities, and a school that was broken up into a series of instruction areas and group facilities.

The ultimate effort of the Chamber to 'manage' poor populations in Hartford was called the Hartford Process. In 1969 this group of private sector people hired James Rouse who had built a 'model city' in Columbia, Maryland. The idea of this initiative was to build new towns in north Hartford and in the suburbs. In the mid-1970's, at the time community organizing and a group named Hartford Areas Rally Together (HART) began to grow, the Hartford Process would make a terrible mistake revealed in an infamous 'memo'. The memo described controlling 'Puerto Rican in-migration' and moving city minorities 'from the ghettos' near downtown to a new town slated for construction near Coventry, Connecticut. This blunder led to the shelving of the 'new town' idea. HART's relationship to the Hartford Process is described later in this chapter.



Residents and police gather on corner of Campfield and Barker Street in Hartford's Barry Square neighborhood at the height of the 1968 riots. Photo courtesy Hartford Public Library.

Rise of Nick Carbone

At the height of power at the Chamber of Commerce, another major influence would soon join the local scene. Thirty-two year old Nick Carbone started on the City Council in 1969 on the heels of three council resignations. Carbone was one of three appointed by the Hartford Town Committee of the Democratic party to fill the vacancies. Carbone had been active as President of the South Hartford Business Association, and represented an Italian ethnic constituency. An Air Force veteran, Carbone was the youngest of three children of Carl Carbone, who had founded a well known restaurant in South Hartford. Before joining the City Council he had graduated from the University of Hartford, sold insurance and worked as a sales representative for a typewriter company.

Carbone plunged into his new job, studying, and putting in unequaled amounts of time. He soon came to dominate the Council. Some of his early city development projects included the Civic Center, One Constitution Plaza, and the American Airlines reservation center.

Carbone described some of the social and political dynamics of 1960's Hartford:

"The Town Committee and the Democratic Party was a much stronger organization and much more viable at that point and time, as the Democratic Party stood for something. It was a party with its foundation with the white, African-American, labor, the inner-city churches. And it was not dominated by liberals.

"When I got on the Council in 1969 or 1970 — we had serious riots in the city. Five or six, two years in a row. So we had a community that was disenfranchised, socially, economically and politically. Through the Civil Rights movement, their expectations were raised — and rightfully so. And their anger at being treated as second class citizens rose when reality fell short of expectations. So the first thing that I had to deal with in 1969 and 1970 were riots, and a citywide curfew. And I had to try to understand — because I think it's the responsibility of the people in leadership — to try to fully understand the circumstances in which people live. So we at City Hall were forced to understand what was causing the riots and anger and frustration, and got involved in dealing with people that were in pain. Over a two or three year period, we decided to take ownership of their problems." [198]

One specific way Carbone responded to the problems of Hartford, recalls Jack Mimnaugh (first director of HART in 1975), was to use massive amounts of Federal funds, especially in north Hartford, to give jobs to prominent black leaders. Carbone gained great control over north Hartford politics, as many who now worked for Carbone could not afford to disagree with him.



Some clergy involved with the creation of HART would later say that exposure to these explosive times developed and 'disturbed' their social values more than any time before or since. Coupled with Carbone's 'benevolent dictatorship' approach to community development, sensitive Hartford residents began to see this policy approach to neighborhood problems at direct odds with the neighborhood-based, group decision making process encouraged by community organizations now growing in numerous parts of the country.

Carbone points the way. Others are friends from his South Hartford Business Association, about 1963. Hartford Public Library.

HART'S Beginning: 1974 and 1975

"Before HART, there were three main influences in Hartford: the Democratic party, the corporations, and the construction unions. There was no power in the neighborhoods".

— *Hartford Courant*, 1981

The Upper Albany Community Organization

Jack Mimnuagh, who in 1975 became director of HART, recalls that:

"The most energetic community organizing that was going on in Hartford [in 1974/5] was UACO, the Upper Albany Community Organization. Nobody even knows about UACO. UACO was founded in the early '70s, initiated by Horace Bushnell Church. They brought up a youth minister, Len Sengali. Len Sengali had been trained in some organizational stuff in Chicago. We never knew exactly who trained him, but Len came out and started working in the upper Albany area. The amount of people that got involved quickly led to the formation of a community organization to serve the upper Albany area.

"They formed neighborhood meetings. They had hundreds of people involved and it was extremely, extremely new in Hartford that anybody would do that kind of stuff. As a result, everybody was going, 'Wow, this is great!'

"That meant that upper Albany was getting a lot of attention and it looked like they were going to have a structure, a permanent organization for people, including foundations, including business community, including the city, and a way of relating to that neighborhood and providing needed services and at the same time doing organizing. So they had a ton of block clubs and a lot of people were involved.

"The success of UACO and its targeting of Albany Avenue prompted some people whose major self interest was the Park Street area to say, 'Why don't we do something similar there?'

Hartford Clergy Create 'Sponsoring Committee' to Launch HART

Mimnuagh:

"The formation of interest [in community organizing] was Tom Goeckler, who was a co-pastor at Sacred Heart Church in Clay Hill. He came to Providence in 1972 or so. I remember this when I was back there, because I started in Providence. He came to Providence to see what we were doing at PACE—People Acting for Community Effort. When he came, he stayed at St. Michael's Rectory, where I was stationed at the time.

"He stayed there for about three weeks, tried to learn the operation and how it was done, did some interviews. He came back to Hartford and the Upper Albany Community Organization and introduced the idea of community organizing to this group of people, a lot of them pastors, who were interested in doing something similar for Park Street area."

Fr. David McDonald, pastor at St. Peter's Church and chair of what was to become the sponsoring committee charged with setting up a structure for HART, said:

"There were several of us who had been exposed to social action kinds of ideas coming from Fr. Jack Egan in Chicago and at the University of Notre Dame. There were many churches where some of those kinds of conversations around advocacy and people's rights to speak for themselves and be in politicking their own agenda, and try to build on it."

In 1974, Goeckler, McDonald and others who were introducing the idea of bringing community organizing to Hartford went to NETCCO (New England Training Center for Community Organizers) and asked for some help. NETCCO's Howie Brown assigned staffperson Renee Martin to work several hours a week with the group. Martin was one of the original organizers with PACE in Providence, and in late 1974 came to Hartford.

"By the time Renee was meeting with them", says Mimnuagh, "the group was down to less than ten I think, but it included Fr. Goeckler from Sacred Heart Church, Fr. David McDonald from St. Peter's, Fr. James Donagher from Our Lady of Sorrows, Fr. Phil Sheridan from St. Lawrence O'Toole and Fr. Bob Rousseau

from St. Anne's. Lee Paquette, who was a neighborhood resident, was also very interested in it, and a few other people."

Footprints: Renee Martin

Renee Martin first came across Gaudette and his Alinsky style organization in the 1960's, and began to understand the dynamics of how community organizations are supposed to work. "I used to sit into the meetings of Gaudette back in Chicago. I was really fascinated. I was impressed with the kinds of things that that they were doing, and how they would turn the theory into practice and that they were moving people."

"When I came to Rhode Island and started working for PACE," Martin recalls, "I had a beard and long hair. Every door I knocked on, I asked the guy if there was any neighborhood organizing stuff going. The first guy I came in contact with said, 'I'll tell you what the problem is with the neighborhood. Niggers. Niggers were destroying the neighborhood.' [laughs] You know, this was a revelation to me. But I really was learning the dynamics of organizing people." [225]

Lee Paquette:

"I was teaching at Northwest Catholic High School and I was living in the South Green [neighborhood of Hartford] area. This was 1974 and a friend of mine who lived in the same house I did, Ed Stivender, put me in touch with Father David McDonald, who was at St. Peter's Church at that time."

At St. Anne's Church on Park Street, where the final interview of

Mimnaugh for the first HART director's job took place, sponsoring committee member Fr. Bob Rousseau had begun to see a lot of changes in the Park Street area. He came to Hartford in 1968 before HART began. Fr. Rousseau:

"The difficulties and many needs of people began to surface. It was Father McDonald who had this idea of organizing people to help themselves and deal with issues that were beginning to arise . . . I was very young at the time, in my twenties. Everyone benefited from the work of HART — including our church — where others achieve better situations in life." [215]

Fr. Phil Sheriden of St. Lawrence O'Toole Church and the sponsoring committee:

"I was very conscious of the fact that I was being manipulated [laughs]. But I was quite willing because . . . it was very important work. What I was displeased with was that he [Fr. McDonald] felt he could not take me into his confidence with regard to some of the people who came from outside to help in the organizing. He may have felt that it was impossible to keep confidentiality, but one of the persons who was very admirable in those days was Jack Mimnaugh, who was a former priest. It would have been very helpful to me to know that. I always was very courteous, always very respectful to him, but there is a sense of brotherhood, too. But maybe they didn't want any partiality, whatever. I felt a sense of being manipulated, though, because I was not really a partner. I don't know if that can be clear to you how that feels. I was being used because I was in a prestigious location.

"Now, Father might totally be unaware that that would be the way I'd feel. I never faced him with it, Father McDonald. He had started out his priestly tenure in what now is real inner city down in New Haven, the Hill, and it was natural for him. He was a wheeler-dealer. He was a politician. It was natural for him to act this way and he probably was totally unconscious of how somebody else might feel.

"St. Lawrence O'Toole was a parish loaded with politicians [Kennelly, Bulkeley, Athanson to name a few]. All of the important people were there, and the expectation was that I was going to manipulate them and twist them around. That wasn't going to happen. I had to be very careful and I believed that efforts to involve the Hispanics of the area, which was kind of contrary to what most of the regular parishioners would like, would have to be undertaken and done in a very careful, loving way. Not rocking the boat, but doing everything gradually."

Naming of 'Hartford Areas Rally Together'

Fr. Sheridan:

"I think the name of HART was an interesting thing. Now, Father Rousseau may remember, but he may not. It seems to me it was at a meeting in the fall at St. Anne's. It was only clergy and organizers. It was way at the beginning and it was a dismal, cold place. It seems to me that's where we came up with the name. Father and I—originally I said, "Gee, we should get a name for this group because that's going to be important if we start publicizing and trying to draw people. I'm the one

who was interested in words and knowing the value of them in the course of the time, and I thought that was a very just title for the group. The diocese of Hartford has on its coat of arms a hart [a deer-like animal once common to Europe] fording a stream, the Connecticut River. We who grew up with that coat of arms in the diocese are quite aware of how marvelous it is to think that a community group can ford a stream, cross a barrier, achieve something. So I was thinking in terms of let's use 'hart', H-A-R-T, let's have it mean something more to be easily remembered by the people of Hartford.

"When it came to naming this group, we had to first of all, give a name that was memorable and a kind of setting. Fr. Rousseau and I inspired almost on the side of the discussion, said, 'Hey, and together we came up the Hartford Areas Rally Together.' I think the original title was Hartford's Areas Rally Together. The thought would be that there might be people over the border who would eventually get in. [Bank] Redlining was one of the first issues, but we knew there would be many needs. The 'Rally' was not simply to make noise. The Rally was like a patient rallies. That was very important. Not so much the banding together for a lot of noise like they do on some campuses. In fact, one of the things that I urged was that it always be clear at any meetings—and many of them were hosted at St. Lawrence—at any meetings of the people, that we were not to be anything but just, anything but true. That meant not only with grassroots people, but also with the powers that be, trying to be together in this."

Prior to the First HART "Community Congress" there was discussion and a vote on whether to keep the name 'Hartford Areas Rally Together' as suggested by the sponsoring committee. The name was kept.

First HART Proposal: Campaign for Human Development

Renee Martin:

"I can remember spending long hours writing the proposal [request for funding of HART staff], because I'm not a writer. I don't enjoy writing. I can remember Dave Beckwith, the director at NETCCO really beating me up to get the damn thing done, you know. And after working all night long on a couple of nights I finally got it done, and sent it to the Campaign for Human Development."

From a draft of this proposal, dated November 8, 1974, came a one sentence statement that would define the work of HART for its first twenty years. "It is through concerted action in finding solutions to neighborhood problems such as crime, inadequate recreational and cultural facilities and services, and deteriorating housing and business conditions that residents will begin to experience a sense of control over the future of their neighborhoods."

Jack Mimnaugh Comes to Hartford

Mimnaugh:

"The sponsoring group started to work with Renee Martin about what it would take to start an organizing project in Hartford. The closer they got to the idea, they started to realize that what they needed was somebody to work more with them [on a full-time basis] to get it off the ground and that NETCCO didn't have anybody on staff to do that, and that's when this group contacted me, where I was working in Baltimore. I was called about my interest in starting a project in New England and specifically in Hartford. I told them I'd come up and meet with some folks. I came up in December of 1974 and met with a group of people about the idea of starting a project in Hartford. I agreed to look over the proposal that they were thinking of doing and made some suggestions about how to do it and what I would do if they would begin. I think I met with them twice in February of 1975 — and agreed at that time to take on the responsibility of whatever we were going to do."

By early 1975, the committee had raised about \$3,000.00 for some expenses and staff salary. Mimnaugh:

"They had enough money that they were paying me a hundred dollars a week, or something like that. They had also submitted a National Campaign for Human Development Proposal for about thirty-five thousand, and I agreed to start work on that."

Mimnaugh was thirty-one years old then, and had been organizing for about six months. He had served two years on the executive board of PACE (People Acting Through Community Effort) in South/South West Providence, Rhode Island with Henry Shelton and Stan Holt. From July 1974 to January 1975 he worked as a full-time neighborhood organizer with Stan Holt for the Southeast Community Organization (SECO) in Baltimore. [85]

"You know," recalls McDonald twenty years later, "probably the best decision we made was hiring Jack".

HART Neighborhoods: South Hartford Focus

At a December 1974 meeting of the sponsoring committee, there was a discussion of 'cutting down' HART's target area to the south end of Hartford. [80] This meant the writing out of Clay Hill and Nelton Court neighborhoods. Goeckler voiced strong opposition to eliminating Clay Hill because of 'its importance to the Spanish'. Others saw Clay Hill as so far distant from the main area of concentration as to be a distraction. By the time Mimnaugh arrived in early 1975, the decision to focus on South Hartford had already been made. At that time, the target HART area in Park Street was about 22% Hispanic and 72% Anglo. [82, 81]

Goeckler:

"I was the north end representative (to the sponsoring committee). I felt from the beginning it was an exercise in futility, because what was going to happen was not what I envisioned would happen, and I still feel

that way. There was an indication, and I think the early proposal shows, and my vision was that HART would embody the Frog Hollow area, Clay Hill - South Arnsenal area. This would have worked against some of the divisiveness of the city, where both of those areas were seen as different worlds. . . . Then you would have had a pincher movement in the City and you would have had two minority communities, black and Hispanics, working together, both at the table. I felt very strongly that if there could be real organizing work done, inclusive of both areas, you could really work to address the divisiveness. Gangs did not start yesterday; these were the years of the Ghetto Brothers and Savage Nomads. We could have been a powerful force had we evolved correctly.

"What was going to happen was we would get the funding, but the real power would be moved from the Park Street area into Behind the Rocks to get a middle class, largely white base, and the North End would be lost as usual. Which is exactly what happened. I knew it was going to happen even when I was putting my signature to the original funding." [193]

Fr. McDonald, the sponsoring committee chair:

"It [organizing] just became too much across the downtown area. People really wanted to see HART become more of a center city, south end organization."

Mimnaugh believes HART was never meant to include neighborhoods outside of South Hartford:

"The whole original idea was that UACO (Upper Albany Community Organization) would stay strong enough for Albany and we would develop a group on the Park Street area and then we'd hook up. We no sooner get going when [director] Len Sengali left UACO and the city and Hartford Process and the business community moved in on UACO and brought in Phil Morrow as executive director of UACO, who was on the staff of Hartford Process. Carbone was willing to pay a ton of money in order to control the agenda. What was a once good neighborhood organization that had lots of neighborhood representation and a service organization, now became the vehicle for Democratic patronage. It became the vehicle where the city of Hartford would put service programming. The budget for UACO exploded and got into areas of housing. So it then became a housing development group. Every house on Vine Street was rehabbed under the direction of UACO.

"Now the nature of development and the nature of social services meant that they were so busy doing that that they stopped organizing. The block clubs didn't meet anymore. The base and the ownership of the board of directors of UACO then became dominated by the foundations and the city and the businesses that funded them. The City lost control of it and so all of a sudden when we picked our heads up and were looking for a partner in upper Albany, there was none there. They had become a major, major social service bureaucracy that really had no neighborhood constituency whatsoever and they remained that way until their death, which was several years later—maybe ten years after that. Major, major disappointment.

"It then meant that now the reverse had happened. Where previously HART was started because the North End was organized and the South End wasn't, all of a sudden HART became the symbol for the South End being organized and the North End now didn't have any good organizing at all." [205]

HART Organizing Begins

"There was a feeling that we could do anything we wanted."

— Jack Mimnaugh

Even though there was very little money to support community organizing staff and to cover other related expenses, organizing began in the spring of 1975.

Mimnaugh:

"I worked on some doorknocking from March until July—actually, I worked from March until September of 1975, living on that \$3,000.00 provided by a local 'Campaign for Human Development' grant.

"The National CHD Grant [written with help from Renee Martin] was awarded in the summer and the moneys began flowing in September or October. The clergy at that time were the folks that I had been meeting with. We began incorporation right away. The clergy and the sponsoring committee had very clear responsibilities. They were to be responsible for all financial accountability for the first year and other legal matters. They were not to get involved in things relating to issues. The committee would know what [issues, other activity] was going on, but we would just go out in the neighborhood and start organizing and see what happened.

"So we started. In fact, we started organizing before the money came in. That was somewhat accidental. It just so happened that some people heard about my being in town, trying to develop this idea. There was a guy who at that time was working for the Knox Foundation, Jesse Ackerman. Someone told him that I was in town and was going to build a community organization and it sounded to him like it was exciting. So he called me up—this is a true story. The guy called me up, tracked me down at St. Peter's Rectory, where McDonald was on Main Street, introduced himself and said, 'Look at, I'm working for the Knox Foundation. I heard you were in town and I'd like to meet with you to talk about working for you.' I said, 'Nice idea, but I don't have any money. I can't even pay myself.' He said, 'I know, but what if I could bring a salary with me, would you be interested?' I said, 'Yes, I'll talk to you.'

"This was Jesse Ackerman. I met him in a bar that is now gone. It was one of these old, old Hartford bars. It's now the seafood restaurant on the corner of Capital and Main. Used to be an old bar there, these old wooden floors, almost walking on years of accumulated dust on the floor because they never swept the floor or anything. I mean it was dark and all dark wood and that kind of stuff. So we had a conversation. I told him what I was interested in doing. He said that was a lot more exciting than what he was doing for the Knox Foundation and he thought the

Knox Foundation that was currently paying him, would pay him to work for me and that what I needed to do was just talk to the folks who were running the Knox Foundation.

"So we set up another meeting in Union Place. Hartford at that time—this the summer of 1975—was really an exciting place. A lot of people on the street, people trying new things. Union Place was a new idea. The restaurants were putting tables out on the sidewalks. There were street artists and people who played music, people who did mime, you know, just a whole bunch of interesting, exciting things right on the street. So on a summer afternoon in 1975 I go to have a beer—actually, this all happened over a beer at an outside table in the middle of Union Place—with Jesse Ackerman, myself, Jack Dollard, who at that time was the director of the Knox Foundation, and Knox Foundation President Gene Mulcahy, who worked for the school board (as the Alternative High School Director) and was a real interesting character.

"I sat down, told them what I wanted to do. Jesse said, 'Yes, that sounds interesting. I'd like to work for him,' and the two of them said, 'Gee, that sounds like a good idea. Okay, we'll give you ten grand to pay Jesse.' At that time ten grand was more than I was paying myself. I said, 'Hey, done deal.' Never wrote a proposal, never did anything. Jesse just had to every couple of weeks send them a little note on what he was doing and they'd pay him."

Jack Dollard, a prominent local architect talked about how he first met Ackerman:

"Jesse wanted to start a kind of food co-op down on Union Place. I thought that was a pretty terrific idea. So, we hired him.

"In the end the food co-op didn't work, but then about that time, Jack Mimnaugh came to the Foundation looking for money. Instead of money we gave him Jessie Ackerman. Jessie went out with his (future) wife Linda (Palmerie) and organized the first HART block clubs." [216]

Mimnaugh:

"So with Jesse now on full time, even though I didn't have any money, we started saying, 'We might as well try and do some stuff.' What else were we going to do? Just sit around twiddling our thumbs, waiting to see if we were going to get any money? So we started door knocking. The first doors we knocked on were on Ward Street. We went from Ward Street and hit York Street and it was really interesting."

Mimnaugh and Ackerman began talking with people in the heart of the Frog Hollow neighborhood. The name, according to neighborhood legend, came from a marsh hollow located near the corner of Ward and Broad Streets. Years ago older residents, many French-speaking, said the marsh was a breeding ground for a substantial frog population. Most of the area was farmland until 1852, when the Sharps Rifle Manufacturing Company constructed an arms production plant along the Park River, at 450 Capitol Avenue site (the most recent use of this site was by Aetna, in a colorful building designed by Jack Dollard). Frog Hollow quickly became an industrial center, producing things such as sewing machines, cars, and bicycles. [79] Park Street, the focal point of Frog Hollow and later the site of the

first and current HART office, derives its present name from Barnard Park (also called the South Green) which in 1821 was the only park in Hartford.

Rats!

"Jack is without a doubt the best organizer I have ever met in my entire life."
— Alta Lash

Mimnaugh:

"People started talking about rats as a problem. The week after we started door knocking there was this front page story (by Antoinette Martin) in the *Hartford Courant* about rats coming out of the Park Street River and overflowing the neighborhood. I mean it was a real frightening story. They described a guy sitting on the roof of a garage and in one night killing ninety-five rats in one backyard on Park Place. I mean you can imagine when that paper hit the streets, everybody in all Frog Hollow was going, 'Holy shit, the rats have taken over. The neighborhood's going to hell!'."

"So we had had a small planning meeting of five residents on York Street to talk about the neighborhood. Everybody was very tentative. Nobody wanted to do anything. It was like nobody wanted to talk—they didn't trust us. We were the two organizers. They didn't trust us. They didn't know what they wanted to do, but we, being fools that we were and young and crazy, we decided we would schedule—this is before the rat story hit the papers—we would schedule this public meeting using St. Anne's Hall and invite people from the neighborhood to talk about rats (they also had invited the City Health Director).

"We had had the planning meeting — just of people on York Street. We didn't have any strong leaders who knew what they were doing. Everybody was tentative, but the story hit the paper and we realized what an opportunity. We immediately just printed up flyers all over the neighborhood. We knew we were going to have a decent turnout because this story was going to get everybody there. We still had no leadership.

"Ten minutes before the meeting we were still sitting down with some people that we had originally talked to and trying to get them to understand how to conduct this meeting and instill confidence in them. They didn't have any confidence in us.

"Meanwhile, we've got this meeting going on with 200 people (in five different languages!) showing up at St. Anne's Hall (meeting was opened by Fr. Bob Rousseau) and we're going, 'Gee, we're really not happy with the folks that are running this meeting. Let's figure out at least can we, coming out of this meeting, get some new leaders, identify some new people to work with.' So we let the meeting just go wild and everybody who stood up that was registering a complaint, the orders that I had given to Jesse and the staff was we were going to run around and take their name and address and those were the people we were going to invite to the next planning meeting. So we were going to get all the aggravated people coming out of this meeting to come to the next planning

meeting and those were the folks we'd begin working with.

"Alta Lash was one of the people. She made the mistake of standing up and the meeting and saying, 'I can't hear,' and Jesse went up and said, 'Can I have your name?' and we invited her to the next planning meeting."

Alta Lash would soon become HART's most prominent neighborhood leader. At the time she was an English teacher at South Catholic and a member of the Sisters of Mercy, a Roman Catholic order of nuns. "What I eventually saw was a group that was offering an alternative for urban people, instead of doing for people, like social work, if offered people a way to do for themselves." Lash eventually left the convent in 1976. [71]

As a follow-up to the first meeting on rats, another gathering was held in August 1976 with City Health director Norton G. Chaucer. He agreed to do a number of things to help control the burgeoning rat population.

As time went by, residents saw no change with the rat infestation. They called Chaucer, who said to them that 'I will never meet with you again.' A planning meeting was held, and after some Hamilton Street residents trooped to the home of Chaucer. He wasn't home, but people left a large hand-made paper rat on his doorstep.

On a warm summer day several days later, the group arrived en masse at a doctor's banquet at the Sheraton Hartford Hotel in downtown Hartford and asked to speak with him. Chaucer, recalls Lash, 'went absolutely crazy'. Chaucer said his department was meeting their demands with a \$10,000 extermination program in their neighborhood. Residents disagreed. "If you want the whole health department to focus on your forty blocks, no way!" he said. "Fire me and get somebody else!" [45]

After a big newspaper story about the incident the next day, Chaucer called and agreed to the group's demands.

HART Grows

Mimnaugh:

"(With the rat issue) there was a lot of publicity, and people asking, 'Who are these new folks in town? What's going on?' We got everybody mad at us, but everybody was talking about us, also, because we were getting large numbers of people out to meetings. It just became a real fun thing. We expanded like crazy.

"We got a bunch of names of the people who were mad at that rat meeting and wanted to do something and within a month we had taken that meeting and turned it into a network of over eight block clubs. We just systematically did Babcock Street, Putnam Street, and then we started going up and down Broad Street. Within the first month we did a block club on Madison, on Lincoln, on Jefferson, Allen Place. We did a block club on Hungerford, and kept on going down the Zion Street corridor. We did one on Hamilton Street. We did one on Harbison, Glendale. The entire operation for the first year was simply expanding on that effort, building block clubs on every street."

The clubs' approach was to determine a community need, isolate a human target and attack — such as a landlord or city official. One night a dozen Babcock Street residents invaded the South Seas restaurant in West Hartford at dinner time, claiming

that a co-owner Don Lee had ignored their request for a meeting. They wanted a litter-strewn property that he owned on Capitol Avenue cleaned. He asked them to stop passing out leaflets to his dining customers, and signed a pledge to clean up the apartment. [45]

Mimnuagh:

"Jesse was having so much fun organizing, he then brought his girlfriend (Linda Palmerie), where she volunteered for a while. I said, 'Okay, well, how about if I hire you part time because I'm not good at book keeping. I'm not good at keeping track of anything. You're just kind of like a secretary-book keeper type, but she kept butting into the work that we were doing. She liked it, so I said, 'Look at, Linda, you're interested in this stuff. You want to try it?' She said, 'Yes, I'd like to try it.' The first assignment I gave her was Allen Place. I said, 'Just go out and talk to some neighborhood people.' I told her how to do that. She goes out to Allen Place and within a week we had a meeting at Allen Place that had seventy-five people there. 'Linda, you're doing something wrong with your life. You should not be a secretary; you should be an organizer,' and I hired her to be an organizer and assigned her to work the Behind the Rocks area." [205]

By September 1975 HART was pulling 900 people a month to block club meetings. Some of the early confrontations born from these meetings were unique to Hartford. City officials were not used to having specific demands made on them. Some were very used to treating neighborhood people in a very patronizing way, and accustomed to working without being bothered by the people. As more and

State Representative LaRosa addressing neighbors at a Brown Street block club meeting in 1977.



more residents began to participate, neighborhood power grew. Neighborhood residents flexed this new muscle of power bringing much-needed attention to long-neglected communities. [49]

"We find people really mad and feeling neglected," Mimnuagh said in 1975. "These are longtime residents, homeowners, and taxpayers. They feel they don't have a say in the decisions that affect their lives." [46]

Footprints: Love at HART

Joan Pilkington:

"I met my husband through my work at HART. I was doorknocking one day, and knocked on his parent's door. He ended up doing an internship with HART. I left for a year, and when I came back to HART we met again. We decided that we'd get married! We were keeping it quiet, but one of the issues when I returned was around prostitution on Washington Street. We had a big meeting, where my husband said that his fiancée had been stopped on the street and asked for a good time! Well I had told someone that this had happened to me too, and it didn't take long for people to figure out that the 'fiancée' was me!" [191]

Vecinos Unidos

From the beginning HART staff and leaders made every effort to involve residents representing the diverse population living in the area. Early work to have Anglos and Spanish-speaking people come together, while not entirely successful, was far more effective than any other effort in Hartford up to that point. A group call "Vecinos Unidos" (translated: "Neighbors United") was created by HART to address issues related to Spanish-speaking population.

Mimnuagh:

"Vecinos began accidentally. In the first four or five months of HART we tried to build groups that were multiracial and multilingual. We attempted to have block club meetings in both languages and in a lot of cases at this time—we're talking 1975-76—there were very few Puerto Ricans living in the neighborhood and those that were moving were new tenants. So there was no Puerto Rican home ownership. We were unsuccessful integrating the Spanish speaking folks in the neighborhood into the block clubs. The block clubs had a tendency of being controlled by the home owners, and we just weren't successful. They didn't feel wanted. They didn't feel comfortable. We had a lot of trouble doing meetings in two languages. It just failed. It failed miserably, but we desperately wanted to show that we could build neighborhoods that were multiracial, that we could build an organization that's multiracial. So we just kept trying new strategies of how to involve the Puerto Rican community.

"Vecinos Unidos was our attempt to do that, when we realized we couldn't do them with block club meetings that were multilingual. So we would organize the Puerto Rican community separately, give them some clout, give them a sense of ownership, participation, develop some

leadership, work on issues that they feel most comfortable with. Then have them as a group negotiate with the other groups within HART. So that was the reason for the creation of Vecinos. There was always a pull between whether Vecinos would be dominated by the lower income tenants in the neighborhood or by the emerging middle class Puerto Ricans in Hartford. There was a lot of class tension in the Puerto Rican community at that time. There still is.

"HART was very clear that we would represent the lower income tenant and the professional Puerto Ricans in the city were very critical of HART. I can't say that we really did a good job at including everybody. We had troubles with that. I think you don't have those same difficulties today, but back then we did.

"So Vecinos was always very controversial. It was very controversial because the predominantly white folks who had been involved in HART for a long time, a lot of folks had difficulty negotiating with Vecinos. So there was always some tension there, but we still did it better than most."

Vecinos Unidos Takes First Action

The *Hartford Courant* reported the beginning of Vecinos Unidos in a February 1976 article. "A Puerto Rican tenants group, Vecinos Unidos, has been formed 'as an instrument of struggle in the fight against substandard housing conditions' in the city. Vecinos Unidos intends to launch a city-wide campaign against slumlords, irresponsible city and law enforcement officials, banks guilty of red-lining

Footprints Chris Merrow, Meeting with Vecinos Unidos:

"In '78-79 it was the first real heavy worry of disinvestment in the city and it had been brought about by a combination of factors: the rise in property taxes, the doubling or tripling of energy costs, the oil embargo, etc. So there was a real crisis and a lot of buildings were being abandoned and a lot of people were being turned out into the street. Vecinos Unidos was really working that field.

"In one particular case a couple of buildings went down with people. It was in the dead of winter. It was freezing. The utilities got shut off. The pipes burst. The buildings were uninhabitable. Sixty or seventy families were essentially homeless. At that time we didn't have the shelter system to deal with something like that. They basically came down and camped out in the function room of City Hall for two or three days, feeling that it was the city's responsibility to fix the situation somehow. At that time, we ultimately were able to respond. I mean we could never do that again. We actually had a staff in the housing department at that time that did nothing but relocation. Ultimately, we were able to find alternative housing for folks, and then worked it out. Everybody was real impatient, tempers were really short. It was pretty intense. That was probably the zenith of my antipathy towards HART."
[laughs]

our communities, and the inhumane conditions they create." The following incident between a landlord and tenant helped to crystallize the start of Vecinos Unidos.

Mrs. Paula Rivera charged that the landlord of the building she lived in at 19-21 Wethersfield Avenue entered her apartment, threw drawers of food on the floor of her kitchen, and sprayed powder around, contaminating food and spraying some on her two year old grand daughter's head. The manager, Robert C. Kenney and owner Robert M. Souza said the roach powder was nontoxic. He said he was only killing roaches as city health officials had asked him. [73]

The next week, sixty people met at St. Peter's Church and demanded the arrest of Kinney and Souza, revocation of Souza's real estate license, and an investigation of police handling of the case. [74] Later, forty members of Vecinos Unidos met with Mayor George Athanson. Shortly after, Kinney was charged with criminal mischief and disorderly conduct. Tenants claim Kinney's actions were in retaliation to complaints they made to the city about the condition of the building. [75]

Vecinos Unidos Challenged

It was near the time of this first action when Vecinos Unidos met the first of numerous internal struggles and conflicts, as well as tension with other HART groups. Eugenio Caro, a founding member of Vecinos Unidos, split with the group, providing a test of HART's efforts at organizing the Hispanic community.

Eugenio Caro, early leader of Vecinos Unidos and in 1995 Hartford City Councilmember:

"The reason why it [Vecinos Unidos] was formed was because the Catholic Church was looking into organizing the Puerto Rican community. And the Campaign for Human Development had a grant available for that. And out of this what they did was form HART, which was different than a group to organize the Puerto Rican community. So, in order to satisfy that need, Vecinos Unidos was formed.

"Out of the [HART] First Congress, they voted me as a member of HART [Board of Directors]. But I became frustrated because, I think, that a lot of the individuals sitting on that board at the time had too many racial tones that didn't fit very well in my ear. I became suspicious, and rather than staying there and giving the organization a problem, I decided to leave and see what happened."

Mimnaugh:

"Eugenio Caro was on the board of directors of HART in its first year. At that time he, in fact, was very much part of the early discussion of how we would organize Spanish speaking folks and he pushed hard. He helped devise the strategy of Vecinos Unidos. He was among the first leaders. Edwin Vargas was one of those too.

"We had a big blow out with Eugenio and Vargas and a few others early on, within the first six months of Vecinos, after the first HART Congress, mostly on the basis of the way they treated women. They did not allow women to be active participants in their meetings. It was the strangest thing I ever saw in my life. I remember going to a meeting of

leaders and the organizer was a woman, and so the next thing I know, there's a circle of chairs being set up and all the men sat in the first circle and all the women were sitting behind, including the organizer. This is a planning meeting; this is not a public meeting. So I walked in and I said, 'No, no, no, no, no. This is outrageous. You can't do that,' and the organizer—I pulled aside the organizer and said, 'What the hell is going on here? and that's when she tells me, 'Well, no, this is the way they want to do it. They don't want women in the inner circle.' I could not tolerate that and that's when I had a big blowout with Eugenio and with Vargas and said, 'That's not acceptable. I'm tolerant of cultural differences, but this is a cultural difference that's a bit too much.' That's when they both left HART."

Caro begins New Group: 'Committee of 24'

Mimnaugh:

"After Caro left Vecinos, he pretty much dropped out, and was not actively involved in a lot of stuff. Then all of a sudden he surfaced with a new organization that he designed himself called the Committee of Twenty-Four. I think they were all men, and were going to become the voice for the Puerto Rican community in Hartford. Eugenio was the leader and they successfully on occasion could produce several hundred people. They did very well with Puerto Rican cultural, such as marches with flags and symbols and music from Puerto Rico, etcetera, etcetera.

"There was a major tension at that time with Vecinos, which was still on-going. They thought (Committee of Twenty-Four)—Eugenio did, and we fought about this very vehemently—that HART should stop organizing the Puerto Rican community and that all Vecinos folks should join the Committee of Twenty-Four.

Footprints: Maria Maisonet and Vecinos Unidos

Maria came to the United States from Puerto Rico in 1967. Five years later she moved to the apartment above HART's Park Street office where she's lived ever since. A teaching assistant for nineteen years at Barnard Brown Elementary School in Hartford, this grandmother of nine also became involved with Vecinos Unidos. With support from that group Maisonet was elected HART's Vice President three times in the late 1970's and early 1980's.

"We worked together," Maisonet said, "fighting for affordable housing, jobs, police protection and anything that helped our children. We would go to buildings where people lived in bad conditions, take pictures, and make landlords fix places up. We had many meetings at City Hall, and organized the first Park Street Festival. We did everything, and I like it all very much."

"We — HART and Caro — disagreed about how to organize a lot and we disagreed about who should organize who and this and that, but we never, never disagreed that, one, that the Puerto Rican community should be organized and that we shouldn't have a bunch of rich people behind closed doors making decisions and screwing over poor people. Eugenio is very clear on that. He has a sense of that and he's been very consistent on that." [204]

The *Hartford Courant* recorded some of the tension at the time. At a public hearing in October of 1979, Eugenio Caro described HART as a 'racist' organization. "If HART is racist, what is the one-for one resolution (a housing ordinance pushed by HART)?" asked Luz Santana of Vecinos Unidos, "What has the Committee of 24 produced?" It would have been more productive if he had talked about what we — all of us in the community — ought to work on next." [71]

Beyond some of these fights around how and who best to organize Hartford's growing Hispanic community, Vecinos Unidos overall was extremely successful around a number of lasting issues involving crime, taxes, housing, jobs and others. These will be described further in this narrative.

The HART Office

Mimnaugh:

"The first office, when I first came to Hartford, was in St. Peter's Rectory [led by Fr. David McDonald] on Main Street and we worked out of there for all of the summer of 1975. It was quite a change for the rectory because this was when we were doing the rat meetings and we were starting to get a lot of people involved. We were using a single room on the second floor of St. Peter's which was really not a very accessible room, and or style. It was not very conducive to rectory living. So we looked for a cheap place to have an office and we moved into a small office on 620 Zion Street near the corner of Zion and Park Street [in October 1975]. We were in there for close to a full year. I think in fact we ran the first congress out of that office."

"The old HART office on [#620] Zion Street, the second door on the left from Park Street was broken into a couple of times early on," said early HART staff Joan Pilkington. "It was very small, crowded and messy — there was never any time to file things! That's where we had staff meetings until 3 a.m. There was so much energy going around then, ideas flying all over the place! I must have walked five miles a day just getting around, talking with people block to block." [191]

Mimnaugh:

"We didn't move to 660 Park Street until after the first HART Congress in 1976. The Burns family had just donated that building, 660 Park Street, to the Catholic Church. [The building was originally the Dominic F. Burns grocery store. A picture taken in 1898 shows a horse and wooden cart parked in front, along with a number of neighborhood young people posing in their Sunday best. [33]] The Catholic Church didn't know what to do with it. They offered it to Sacred Heart Church [Fr. Goeckler]

and El Hogar del Futuro, who offered to take it to begin the development of what is now a fairly successful building coop development group in the city. I remember after the pharmacy, which was there before we were there, going in there and looking around. We toured the place one day and talked about who would take which space and which rooms and what rent and we decided that we would start renting from them.

"We moved into 660 Park Street when the marks of the pharmacy were still very much alive. Everyone still thought that's what it was — you could still see the signs for the pharmacy were still up on the front. It was only after we were there for quite a while that those were taken down.

"That building literally was a real mess, and as you might know, it stayed a mess, even when we were there." [205]

Mike Gorzoch was a community organizer with HART and has colorful memories of the early HART office:

"I was there when we did our first renovations to the HART office in 1979. Brigitte Poulin, the HART President from Saybrooke Street had a husband who was in the sheet rock business. She got her husband to come in and put up some dividers so we would have a little bit of privacy. But it was — when I was there — just open, from window all the way back to the back wall. And then we had old, metal desks in a row. We didn't even use the upstairs at all. That was storage. We had broken up tile floor, and we had rats and we had roaches. We had one messy bathroom in the back. We had an old hand-crank messy machine, and maybe two or three broken down typewriters. I remember one hot summer rats, we had a couple die in the wall, and we couldn't find them, and the office smelled like a dead rat all summer. [laughs] Everybody smoked cigarettes. I mean, there was always cigarette smoke and dead rat, and the hot and humid — no air conditioning."

Working from the new office on Park Street, Vecinos Unidos and the strong network of HART blockclubs built on the successes of the rodent and early landlord problems to tackle a host of other pressing neighborhood issues. In this setting of challenge, energy and commitment residents rolled up their sleeves to begin revitalizing their neighborhoods, creating and refining one of the most successful organizations of its kind.



In 1976, HART moved into its new and current office at 660 Park Street.

HART 1976 - 1980: The Early Years

Rose Percoski, a Barry Square representative to the HART board, mother of five and grandmother of three said in 1979, "When people are getting stepped on, and say 'I can't', it makes me mad. I say 'I can!'" [67]

First HART Congress: 1976

"I think Jack Mimnaugh and Alta Lash are the best organizers I've ever known, and I've met a lot of them. (With them), the Congress of HART was always well done. It developed leadership. It had strong issues. It had mass participation. It created political pressures."

— Mo Coleman, director of Hartford Process following the Hartford Neighborhood Coalition and 'Hartford Memo' incidents

According to the HART constitution, the different HART groups would come together once a year at an event called the Community Congress. Here, the collective membership of this group identifies priority issues for the upcoming year. It is also an opportunity to meet with key public officials to take action on major neighborhood concerns.

To announce the first HART Congress in 1976, a coalition of neighborhood groups held a press conference. Immediately following the press conference, four Jefferson Street residents dumped a pick-up load of trash on the Middletown lawn of an absentee landlord, Clifford Opalcz of 243 Jefferson Street. A flyer left at the site said, "If the garbage is in his own backyard, maybe he will do something about it." [76] (Note: the Jefferson Street property was cleaned a short time later).

The first HART Congress was held at Bulkeley High School, with over 1,200 people participating to elect their first officers and executive board and to pass resolutions that reflected their concerns. 'Bank redlining' was the top issue as voted on by those present. (This issue is detailed later in this book). An article from a 1977 *Southside News* described the scene of that first Congress in this way: "it unfolded in an atmosphere of great excitement, and lasted about eight hours." Seven official groups were represented: Southwest, Barry



First HART President Frank Garfi, speaking at 2nd HART Congress in 1977.

Footprints: John O'Connell

"My involvement with HART really actually started with my wife in 1975. At the time we rented an apartment on Ansonia Street. Our neighborhood was subject to a vandal who regularly painted swastikas on about a hundred and fifty or two hundred houses a night for a while. That obviously got the whole neighborhood up in arms, as to why people were unable to catch this guy — I don't know if he spray-painted or wrote with crayons. But it wasn't like one or two houses. It was the whole neighborhood. They had a big meeting at Kennelly School with Mayor George Athanson. My wife went.

"We got involved with (HART organizer) Jessie Ackerman, and he said we should start a group called Southwest Concerned Citizens, and that was one of the early HART groups. And we organized a meeting. That's funny. That's how I met John Cunnane (a former City Councilman and in 1995 a staffperson for Councilman John O'Connell). We organized a meeting at the Kennelly School, where Barbara Kennelly was a Councilwoman along with John Cunnane, and Bill DiBella.

"We also started working on the charter, if you will, of HART. And we used to meet in the basement of St. James Church on Zion Street [Christ Lutheran Church on Broad Street was also used]. We were very active in setting up a constitution and trying to organize the first Congress. And then my wife took ill, and I couldn't spend the time that I had before.

"All during this period there was tremendous organizing effort, trying to raise the consciousness of people."

Square, Behind the Rock, Parkville, Vecinos Unidos, Center City, and the South/Central Business and Professional Organization. The Executive Director Jack Mimnaugh, five community organizers, and five volunteers supported by the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act helped staff the event. [49]

"The atmosphere at the first Congress was unbelievable," reports former HART community organizer Joan Pilkington. People were so excited, and felt that they were contributing to the neighborhood. All sorts of different people came together." [191]

Neighborhoods Take Control

Before and after the first Congress there was a series of major confrontations around specific neighborhood issues that HART would have with Deputy Mayor Nick Carbone. Throughout these fights the common thread was the desire of neighborhoods to have more control on decisions that affected their communities. The first of these issues took place on a residential street in the Behind the Rocks neighborhood of Hartford.

Stone Street

Stone Street rolls shortly through the 'Behind the Rocks' neighborhood from New Britain Avenue to Dart Street, where at the Charter Oak Terrace public housing project it becomes

Brookfield Avenue. "Behind the Rocks" came to be called so as early as the 1850's, and at different times has been called 'the Rock' or 'Back of the Rock'. At that time many area men worked the ledge quarry beneath Trinity College that had been providing macadam for Hartford streets for over fifty years. The area, including Stone Street, was used for farming well into the 20th century. Some of the farms extended from the rock ledge at Trinity College to the Park River. Elsewhere in the neighborhood, the Gunning Farm on Grand Avenue had a dirt road driveway which later became Sherbrooke Avenue. The Hughes Farm extended from St. James Church on Zion Street to Hillside Avenue, the Clancy Farm became Charter Oak Terrace, and the King Dairy Farm became the Rice Heights housing project.

War jobs attracted many newcomers and prompted considerable home building within the area. Backed by Travelers Insurance Company, duplex homes were built on Catherine Street, Allendale Road, Hillside Avenue, New Britain Avenue and Nepaug and Goshen Streets. [116]

Residents in this corner of the city had complained for months that huge trucks owned by the Balf Construction Company used their streets to get from the Balf quarry in Newington to the Flatbush Avenue entrance of Interstate 84 in Hartford. Many of the trucks weighed up to 75,000 pounds when loaded. In June of 1975 area homeowners and other residents of nearby Stone and Brookfield Streets had signs posted prohibiting trucks from using those thoroughfares as through streets. These were placed after Hartford officials requested that the State Traffic Commission put them up. [50]

Neighborhood leader and Arlington Street resident Flora Long: "It was very subtle in the very beginning. We saw trucks going down Stone Street, and we figured, 'Well, maybe they're doing something in the area, so no problem.' But then you see

Louis St. Peter and a neighbor, Mary Maloney watch as a Balf truck rolls down Stone Street. Hartford Public Library.



them coming and going. Over time you see a variety of larger trucks. What bothered me at first was nothing was being done to protect the children in the area from this intrusion. Children from the Charter Oak Terrace housing project walking to Batchelder School via Stone Street were not protected from this menace. I saw a tractor-trailer as long as a block. On the truck bed were round sewer pipes. I could stand in the pipes. That's how tall they were — and wide. 'This does not belong in a neighborhood. This is nuts. This can't happen.' In addition, cracks developed in our home walls. Also, a water pipe that extends into our home from the main water line developed a leak. We had to crack the basement floor to get to it."

In September 1975 the City Council passed an ordinance giving the city administration power to bar heavy vehicles from certain designated areas. A last minute appeal from the Connecticut Construction Industries Association to delay a vote on the ordinance was supported vigorously by Democratic Council leaders Richard Suisman and William Dibella, but was overridden by their colleagues. The ordinance was introduced by Councilwoman Barbara Kennelly. [51] (Kennelly grew up in the area on Cumberland Street, and was elected to the City Council in 1975. She holds a Masters Degree in Government from Trinity College).

Deputy Mayor Nick Carbone and HART leaders Flora and Guy Long have somewhat different accounts of this first of many battles on Stone Street truck traffic.

Carbone:

"I shut Stone Street down. I solved the problem. The city had the right to make a street one way. You discontinue a portion of the street and put the barriers up."

Flora Long:

"At first the officials were ignoring us. In fact, they would even laugh, snicker, or talk among themselves when other people were trying to talk. It was a big joke to them."

Guy Long:

"We were down at City Hall, and it was during a Monday night meeting at the Town Hall. They gave us the floor, and I was talking, and it was about all the trucks coming down, and the hall was full. It was jammed. I mean, there were people outside and everything. And Balf tried to intimidate us by bringing in truck drivers — a bunch of truck driving men saying, 'Grrrr.' Trying to fight you, you know? And then they called a bomb scare. During the bomb scare, everybody had to get out of the building. And when we got outside there was Carbone was sitting in Savin's limousine. Savin actually owned Balf. [The Savin family was also a major contributor and fundraiser for the Democratic Party]. We couldn't believe the audacity. In front of everybody! That takes a lot of — 'Hey, you can't touch me' type of thing, you know? It's not like he did it behind our back. It was right in front of you. [202]

"There's one guy that really went to bat for us, and that was Alexander Goldfarb, the Corporation Counsel. He did a lot to help us out on this truck traffic. As a matter of fact, I believe that he was thrown out by Nick Carbone as a result of it. He knew the inner workings, and he was willing to help us. We had a commitment from him. No fee. He said,

'We had to get the troops out and enough people to say, 'Yes, I want this stopped.' He said that he knew that he could win. He helped put up the no thru truck sign. He was instrumental in that. And I think that that got him on the wrong side of Carbone [who later fired Goldfarb]. He wouldn't take anything from Carbone, and Carbone had a lot of power. Not too many people liked Goldfarb because Goldfarb could win, and he knew how to win. He was a smart cookie'."

Carbone:

"Goldfarb lost his job because he sided with Governor Ella Grasso, okay? I had gotten in a fight with him because he didn't want the carousel at Bushnell Park where it is now. He wanted it over here, next to the railroad station because he lived in Bushnell Tower. And that's the fight I had with Goldfarb, okay? Stone Street I closed. I found a way to close it. Goldfarb did not side with people on Stone Street." [198]

Shortly after in 1976, a General Assembly committee overruled the State Traffic Commission regulation banning through truck traffic on Stone and Brookfield Streets. [52] The trucks again rolled, unabated for more than three years.

Stone Street, Take II

In April 1980, the City of Hartford erected an 18-inch asphalt barrier at the intersection of Stone and Dart Streets. Six years later, US District Judge Alan Nevas ordered the berm removed. Neighbors again rallied in opposition to the truck traffic. [119]

Flora Long describes the second chapter of the Stone Street fight, beginning in 1986:

"We tried to speak to it so that there would be a sign, 'No thru truck traffic'. That didn't work. The city decided they were going to put a barrier up instead. It was an asphalt hump that you would have to drive over. It was placed at the very end of Stone Street, opposite the stop sign. Cars and trucks would not be able to maneuver this obstacle.

"Now, I don't know who's bright idea that was [from the City]. They should have known that they were violating a law. Now that I think about it, you wonder what they had in mind knowing full well this would not be the long term solution. The paperwork to prohibit truck traffic on Stone Street was not processed correctly, and didn't the owners of Balf and their lawyers pick up on that? Who is minding the store? How was Carbone involved with all of this? Who is making sure that the process, from the beginning to the end, was complete? Was everything done legally? Lawyers representing Balf discovered a loophole. They sued and won. Of course, the roadway was then open to everyone, including truck traffic. We had a hundred trucks an hour traveling through our neighborhood."

In a June 17, 1986 article residents said 500-700 trucks used the streets every day, creating noise and safety problems on their streets and structural problems with their houses.

On June 24, Stone Street residents brought rush-hour truck traffic to a standstill causing scores of trucks to turn around and take other routes to I-84. twenty-five residents blocked the intersection of Stone and Arlington Streets for forty-five minutes. They allowed autos to pass but immediately reformed their chain to keep trucks from getting through. At times the scene became tense, with truck drivers yelling and cursing at demonstrators. "This is democracy at work, civil disobedience, without harm to anyone," said Flora Long. "The people of this neighborhood have no other way to show the city how we feel." [119]

Long said that she was prepared to get arrested if necessary. "I never thought I could prepare my mind for something like that, but the anger just takes over. You back somebody against the wall, even the most non-violent, peaceful person, and they will fight back." [122] Long:

"For us to make the decision to picket at the intersection of Stone and Arlington Streets was a difficult one. I had many a sleepless night. I had to explain to my children that this was the only non-violent way to draw attention to our problem without breaking the law. We crossed the street continuously, curb to curb. I often feared that some technicality would be used to arrest me and my neighbors. Jobs could be lost. Anything could happen to us. Deputy Mayor Rudy Arnold put us at ease. No one was going to break the law by picketing. As citizens, we had a constitutional right. There were no other constructive ways to fight the City and Balf. This action took an awful lot out of me."

HART organizer Jane Murphy recalls:

"There was a protest and they backed up trucks for all the way out into New Britain Avenue and across the street. They just walked in front of a truck. A whole line of people. Kids and baby carriages. Police came and broke it up. They didn't arrest anybody, but the people were prepared to get arrested if they had to.

"No one at City Hall was listening to us. The only way to finally get them to listen, was to stop a truck. Send your trucks somewhere else. There are other routes that you can use."

Footprints: Jane Murphy

"I felt that I got so much more out of HART than I could ever give. I think that the people who live in Hartford chose to challenge their whole upbringing by getting confrontational, to fight a cause they really believed in. I don't think I have what it takes to do that. That is why when I left there I felt like — these people are so much better than me. They're so much more committed than I am. It's nice that people say, 'It's great that you worked there and I admire you for doing that.' Don't admire me, admire them. They do it every day. They live there every day. They did it because they want a better life. They want a better neighborhood for their kids." Murphy left HART in 1988. [231]

Rise of John Fonfara

Flora Long:

"There was a fellow, John Fonfara, who was coming in as a candidate against State Representative Felix Karsky in 1986. John Fonfara really wanted his seat. He recognized that Felix was not attentive to the problem in our area. I kept saying, "Where are my representatives?" The issue had been widely published in the paper. Nobody asked any questions. They're sitting on their laurels, not caring. Well, all of a sudden, John Fonfara came on the scene. He had tried several times to get into politics, but without success. He was considered a novice. He began to walk Stone Streets with us, back and forth, curb to curb. He did speak to the problem. His name was often mentioned in the paper."

Guy Long:

"Finally State Representative Karsky did come around, but he was the Johnny-Come-Lately. He came around because Fonfara was here. Fonfara really started pushing it, and it was just showing that Karsky only was coming around to get his name in the *Hartford Courant*, because Fonfara was getting a lot of publicity, as a result of it." Fonfara was elected in 1986.

Jane Murphy, HART organizer:

"It was because of the Stone Street issue that John Fonfara rose. It was kind of almost comical that John could come down every morning and we would be protesting, and John would walk with us. Then one day Karsky came to the meeting. 'All right, down in the middle of the street,' he said, 'I'll stop those trucks if I have to.' And he was out there the next morning, but it was too late. John had been there the week before. If not for Stone Street John would probably be still the Democratic Town Committee member, and Felix Karsky would probably still be the State Representative.

"Karsky didn't think John would ever challenge him. He was just this kid who hung around. If it wasn't for those people down there on Stone Street, Fonfara wouldn't be here today."

Flora Long:

"We went to the Department of Transportation [in 1987], and we were told flat out that they did not have the power to make any changes. They felt we were just there to make a lot of noise, and that would be the end of that. It was only by legislation that the DOT could be empowered to over-ride the city to make sure that the truck signs were posted. And that's what did it. Fonfara, needed a favor — you know how politicians work with each other. During part of our conversation someone said something about "home rule". Do you really want it, they asked Fonfara? He said, 'Yes. This is very important to the neighborhood, and if you ever have a problem, this legislation can be utilized by you.' It was a selling tactic. As soon as the DOT was given the power by the legislation, our signs went up. That stopped the traffic."

Governor William O'Neill vetoed the bill, introduced by freshman lawmaker John Fonfara, on July 8, 1987. It would have given the State

Traffic Commission the authority to prohibit truck traffic through municipal streets if it determined such traffic was dangerous. [120] O'Neill's decision was not based on legal criteria, as he contended, but on financial support Balf executives provided to the Governor's 1986 Gubernatorial campaign. Savin family members, who own Balf Company, contributed \$6,500 to O'Neill. Balf also had construction contracts with the state totaling \$166 million, placing it among the largest highway-construction companies doing business in Connecticut. Resident Alvin Carter said that "Balf's influence is far reaching. I think they were directly involved in O'Neill's handling of the bill and I think the money they gave his campaign had a great deal to do with his veto." [123]

Hartford Courant columnist Tom Condon wrote that: "Balf has a half-billion dollars in state contracts. Nobody tells them what to do. Neighborhoods shouldn't be sacrificed when alternatives are available." [144]

On July 14, 1987 Governor O'Neill sent a letter to all legislators urging them not to seek an over-ride of House Bill 6925. The bill had received overwhelming support in the House and was also passed in the Senate in May.

A month later on August 15, a 76 year old Newington man was hit and killed by a truck at Newington and New Britain Avenues. The 76,000 pound truck was from Balf Company. "The drivers sit so high in those trucks," said Carole Yelinski of Stone Street. The man was dragged under the truck for about thirty feet. [121] Guy Long:

"We were at a meeting at the *Courant*, trying to explain our problem with the editorial staff when we heard that the guy was killed right at the top of the street by one of the big trucks. We were told it ran right over him while he was attempting to cross the street. A truck was parked there, at the light. It was the elderly man's fault, apparently. The truck wasn't moving at the time, but he started crossing the street, and the truck had the green light, and he started his truck moving. The truck is so high that he couldn't see this person in front — it went right over him. The truck dragged him for about two blocks before he was stopped." As many as 100 trucks an hour continued to roll along Stone Street through the summer.

Flora Long:

"Down deep, I think that the State didn't want to resolve this right away, and the reason was they were in the process of finishing Interstate 84 and the Newfield Avenue bridge. That meant that they would have had to travel another mile or three-quarters of a mile more. When you have a hundred trucks an hour, and they have to travel another three-quarters of a mile or a mile, it makes a big difference.

The Newfield Avenue bridge reopened in early September 1988. On September 9, 1988, J. William Burns, the State Transportation Commissioner voted to close Stone and Brookfield Streets to through truck-traffic. Hartford Deputy Mayor Al Marotta also helped by pushing the City Manager to support the state law. [124] But four days later, Judge Alan Nevas again issued a temporary restraining order prohibiting the State Transportation Commission from banning truck traffic of the street. [125]

Finally, on September 30, 1988, Balf agreed to stop using Stone and Brookfield Streets, but still wanted the city to conduct a study of building a ramp between I-84 and New Britain Avenue for their trucks. The City said it didn't want to do the study because hundreds of homes would have been demolished to make way for the ramp. [145] Today, Stone Street remains clear of heavy truck traffic.

Blockbusting

HART's efforts to increase neighborhoods involvement in decisions and policies that affected or harmed their community involved both private and public arenas. The next campaign was around a critical investment issue involving banks and the City of Hartford.

In March of 1976 a real estate agent took a young couple to see a house on Sequin Street. The couple liked the house enough to ask if the present owners could be out in sixty days and that they would be in touch in two days. The agent took the couple outside the house and pointed toward the Charter Oak housing project and told a few stories. The young man came back inside and said they were now not interested. The couple eventually bought a house in the south east part of Hartford. [91]

In April 1976 more than forty people reported having been called or visited by a realtor. [103]. One was a resident named Lucille Meinsler. In a written statement dated January 12, 1977, Meinsler said that she:

"received a phone call from a woman who identified herself from Martin Realty. The realtor said she had a 'nice little ranch' for sale on Linnmoore Street and did I have any friends or relatives who were looking for a house. I said no.

"She then asked if I was interested in selling my house or if I knew if any of my neighbors were interested in selling. I then said, 'I think what you are asking me is against the law.' She said I didn't understand what she was saying. I told her I was not interested in selling and that I would appreciate her not calling again." [96]

Flora Long:

"As Arlington Street residents, we saw the discrimination. We lived through all the events that destroy a neighborhood. I didn't see it living with my mother on Pawtucket Street, but I saw it once we purchased this home. Realtors would walk up and down the street soliciting. While raking our yard one day, I was asked if I wanted to sell my home. They very blatantly spoke of Charter Oak Terrace and that the school system was not quite what it should be. They would use innuendoes. The realtor would make note of a home purchased by a man up the street. Before the conversation ended you knew the person was black. Your instincts told you this conversation should not be taking place. You knew right away what was happening.

"The realtors had already used the same tactics in the Blue Hills area [of Hartford]. They frightened the people into selling their homes using black home ownership as their tool. Then they used the same methods to turn over our neighborhood. They used Charter Oak Terrace as a weak point in our area.

"I once figured, 'Well, that's business.' As time goes on, you become very angry because it becomes troublesome. Then people actually begin moving out. Not one family a year, but multiple families moving out at a time. I could not understand why this was happening. My husband and I grew angry, too. We are not the only people that felt that way. I was asked once by a neighborhood person, 'When are you leaving?' The more families I saw leave, the more determined I was to stay and fight."

A month later, a dozen South West residents, including Agnes Dubin and Frank and Sandy Garfi, went to Martin's real estate office on New Park Avenue office. Paula Martin said, "We're not stupid enough to solicit." [97] The group also claimed that Martin used degrading advertising. In early March at a meeting at St. Lawrence O'Toole Church, Martin agreed to stop using telephone solicitation which he insists are legal — until Hartford's Corporation Counsel decides he is right. Members of the Behind the Rocks group and Martin also agreed to work together to change his advertising of low down payment and federally backed mortgages in the area, which helped fuel the rapid turnover taking place in the area. Residents said Martin was creating a bleak picture of the neighborhood, which its residents regarded as a healthy community. [97]

Residents protect outside the Martin real estate office in early 1976.



Jack Mimnaugh:

"This [was the] real first big power issue for HART came from Behind the Rocks, and it had to do with the racial steering. It was called block busting, and at the time we did a couple of things. We went after a couple of realtors who were the most notorious, Martin being one of them. He was the guy who we caught going up and showing pictures of a black couple moving into the neighborhood, saying, 'Did you meet

your next-door neighbor? Do you want to sell your house?' We chased that guy. We had meetings at his office.

"Yes, we did a lot of actions against that guy and we made that a major public issue, and in order to do something about it because part of this was putting up a bunch of 'for sale' signs in the neighborhood and basically trying to create a panic in the neighborhood to force a quick turnover of lots of houses. We put together an ordinance called 'anti-solicitation' that you couldn't solicit business in the neighborhood, like they were doing. At the beginning Nick Carbone fought us on it. 'No, we didn't need that,' he said."

In the end, the ordinance passed and put a stop to unwanted solicitation from real estate agents.

Footprints: What HART Means to Flora Long

"Jesse Ackerman knocked on my door one day. He introduced himself and said that a community organization had started and explained what it could mean to my neighborhood. He asked me if I had one wish, what would I wish for my neighborhood. I said, 'If you've got all day, I have a very long laundry list.' You can see how much frustration had built up to that point.

"He was very patient, and a good listener. I asked him how long this organization would be around. The do-gooders — they come and they go. I didn't want to waste my time on another organization that would not work. Jesse was very adamant that HART was going to be around for as long as the community wanted them. That's all I needed to hear. The plan was a good idea. At that time, I was encouraged to stay in Hartford because I felt that I had a forum in which to speak to my concerns. I was willing to take part in this new venture.

"Now, you have to know my family background. My parents felt there were professional people to care for our needs, whether it was a physician or a political system. These educated people would have the background to take care of everything. Because of this mindset, I was never encouraged to speak out against an issue. You didn't form a group and be very aggressive. This was all very new to me.

"Just the magnitude of all these people coming together was very powerful. Neighbor after neighbor, shaking their heads in the affirmative to a resolution while city department heads looked on showed me the power of people. 'Yes, this is where I want my tax money,' and 'This is where I want to make change,' was echoed again and again. When you look around the room, and see these officials are so overwhelmed by that sense of power, it gave you a whole different feeling. I've never felt that in my entire life. [202]

"I've said more than once — and I've said it in front of a crowd — that it's helped me as a person. My growth was being part of HART, and I'll be forever grateful. Because it was after that that I was able to take off in many, many areas. It was because I felt confident to speak for myself, speak for my community, and confront anyone who challenges me — even today." [202]

Bank 'Redlining'

A companion issue to blockbusting involved what was called 'redlining'. This was another early and powerful example of residents wanting a say in what happened in their communities.

In March of 1976 an ordinance was introduced at the insistence of HART that would require withdrawal of over five million dollars in city pension funds from banks that refused mortgages in declining city neighborhoods, a practice called 'red lining'. Redlining occurs when a bank decides that a particular neighborhood is decaying and unstable and that it would be risky to put mortgage money into the neighborhood. This was based on a similar measure passed in Chicago. [32]

The City Treasurer John 'Bud' Mahon said there is no need for this ordinance, saying that "I think all the banks are very fair. There isn't any redlining...they are big taxpayers and they do a good job for the city." Jan-Gee McColam, a vice president with Hartford National Bank, said there is no deliberate redlining, although there may be some 'unconscious redlining'. One banker, Elliot Miller of Society for Savings, supported the proposal. He said citizens ought to know where banks are putting their mortgage money before citizens decide where to invest their savings. [95]

Twenty years later, Miller recalled that:

"HART began talking to us with some emphasis about investments in the neighborhoods. 'If we're going to put our dollars in your bank, why isn't your bank putting your dollars, which are really our dollars, back in our neighborhood?' There was one particular HART organization located Behind the Rocks that was particularly interested in talking to us. One of the things I thought would be a good idea was to try to explain a little bit to them what business was, but also listen to them and see what they thought their needs were. Because banks don't really necessarily take money from a given neighborhood and put it back into that neighborhood. Banks, at least in theory, are supposed to be redistributing money from surplus areas to shortage areas. So, in talking to HART representatives, I held out the possibility that maybe we should put more back into a neighborhood than came out." [217]

In July 1976, Mr. McDonough, president of Hartford Federal Savings and Loans said he would not release data showing how much money the neighborhood has deposited in his bank stating 'it would open up a can of worms because people would not like what they saw.' [104]

A year later the redlining ordinance still had not moved in City Council. Nick Carbone said that he and members of the Corporation Council were working to make the proposed ordinance tougher. Mrs. Hennessey, the City's Corporation Council, said she had never even seen the ordinance until HART forced it to the surface just one week before. [94] HART leader Alta Lash holds that "Nick fought us every step of the way on this one."

Mechanics Savings Bank, Society for Savings, and Hartford Federal Savings were all invited but did not attend HART's first Congress in October of 1976. A HART press release said their 'lack of response is additional proof that they are trying to hide from the destruction their policies are causing in our neighborhoods.' [92]

Redlining activity was shown to extend beyond the board rooms of area lending

institutions. In 1976, a map from American Airlines was discovered showing which Hartford neighborhoods were 'not appropriate' to live in. [93]

Nick Carbone:

"HART was involved in [redlining issue]. HART got mad at me because my style in the business community is I would go to them with an issue and say, 'This is what I perceive as wrong. I want you to work with me on correcting that, without going public.' So I tried to get the redlining ordinance passed. HART wanted to pass the redlining ordinance. I took it in very quietly so that the Chamber and the business community said, 'There's a legitimate complaint here.' We want to deal with it here, and because we have city deposits, I want to create an ordinance, which you guys agree to. But an ordinance which will have you then change your behavior. Of course, HART is pushing the ordinance, and I won't adopt their ordinance. Because I have got to give the business community a chance to go through their whole management process. I then told them if they didn't, that I would have to go public and authorize the corporation counsel to begin suing. I did not want to sue my business community — be it bankers or insurance companies — without first trying to negotiate with them.

"My role was to be a mediator between the haves and the have-nots. My style was trying to find a better solution. We had taken ownership of the problem. And the organizers and the media got the community off in a marching victory. You know, everything was, 'How do we get a victory?' Yes and no answer. Pass our resolution. Well, that was an organizing victory, and I knew what they wanted to do. But my role was to be the real check. So that caused some confrontation. And it wasn't a confrontation on goals. It was a confrontation on means. The end objective was that I didn't disagree with what HART wanted." [198]

Mimnaugh:

"Carbone fought us on it (redlining) and he fought us on it and when it became clear that we were going to win, he flipped."

Lash: "Not only flipped, he jumped in front."

Mimnaugh: "Yes, then he decided —"

Lash: "This was his idea."

Mimnaugh: "Yes, 'This is right, those folks are right. This is a good idea,' Carbone said. The next thing you know—you ask him to tell you the story today, he'll say he thought of it!"

Lash: "Carbone went to a HART Congress three years after that and stood up in front of a group and said, 'I got this. This is mine.' I remember the fight and I said, 'You know, Nick, we both know that's not true,' and Nick Carbone said to me, 'That doesn't matter. All that matters is that they believe it is true.'" [204]

Even though the ordinance passed, Mimnaugh believes the importance of the new law soon faded. "We began to negotiate directly with banks, which we thought was a more productive approach than a policy fight [the redlining ordinance] which

didn't put real money back into the neighborhood." This work with banks and the related 'Community Reinvestment Act' is described later in this book.

Neighborhoods Versus Downtown

After the neighborhood battles of Stone Street, block busting and redlining, HART's attention turned to a booming downtown Hartford. Business and political leaders claimed that benefits from the downtown success would eventually work their way back into Hartford neighborhoods. This 'trickle down' theory of neighborhood development never happened.

Mimnaugh:

"Now, following on the heels of that [redlining issue], we were starting to say, 'Okay, now we've got City Hall changing the way they do business in the neighborhood. We've taken on the banks and we won some stuff on redlining and we won some stuff on anti-solicitation against the real estate industry,' and our focus at that time started to be with massive downtown development.

"What was going on at that was that deals were being put together that were very different than deals that the city had ever done before. American Airlines was one. The Stilts Building was another one. The Richardson was another. The Hilton Hotel.

"Nick was involved in a lot of this stuff. We would find out about a city interest in a project and say, 'Oh, my God, the city's a partner with developers and the City owns this and the City owns a part time interest in this. There're no taxes, but there will be taxes based on net profit and not gross profit.' Just things that the city had never done before. The perception in the neighborhoods was that the city once again was giving away the store, without disclosure, without letting people in who were taxpayers in the city know what's really going on, and that it's to the benefit of the rich developer and landholders downtown and not for the development of the city."

Alta Lash:

"The trickle down theory was clearly the feeling. If you develop downtown, it will trickle down into the neighborhoods."

Mimnaugh:

"Somehow the neighborhoods will benefit. It will somehow eventually mean lower taxes in the neighborhoods. We went through a period in the late '70s to the mid '80s of warching six million square feet of office space be developed, all with the promise that this was going to create better taxes and relieve the pressure of neighborhoods. All the tax breaks and the state funds and the federal funds that were used to support a lot of that stuff, and we came to find out that none of it ever developed into lower taxes for the neighborhoods. It just didn't work."

Skywalk

A sign made by a resident: "We need police in the streets not a walk in the sky."

"Skywalk: a hermetically sealed environment for suburbanites."

— letter from a supporter in Detroit [10]

"The skywalk is a grandiose scheme that would result in the segregation of people in Hartford."

— from the *Waterbury Republic* [90]

'Nick's Skywalk' issue was the biggest victory yet for the young HART. It was also a critical event for downtown and the political career of Nick Carbone.

Richard Suisman, a City Councilman, describes the relationship between downtown and Carbone leading up to the Skywalk fight:

"We had a democratic governor and senate from about 1974, and had a pretty good working group on the Hartford City Council. We did relate regularly to the business community. Before I got on council, just to show you the trust, Carbone and John Filer [CEO of Aetna] shook hands and broke ground on the Civic Center many months before the lawyers finished the contract. So there was a lot of confidence back and forth. Even though some thought the business community was self-serving in many ways, we felt that even if that were their only motivation, it still turned out to be the best type of relationship we thought the city should have. We thought then as now that we were a poor city, without many resources or jobs, a struggling school system, etc. Though then the job base was a great deal stronger."

In mid-1978 a new set of plans for the proposed downtown skywalk system was unveiled. The skywalk, envisioned as a curved stainless steel tube, sparked a debate not over aesthetics but over the merits of any further downtown development. The walkway would go from Constitution plaza to the Brown Thompson building, (the former) G. Fox department store and American Airlines. A combination of federal, state, city and private would finance the walkway [1]

Alta Lash was a key resident leader on this issue. She remembers the very beginning:

"People already didn't like the idea of a skywalk, but one night I was coming back from some work thing I had to do. I stopped in City Hall and it was a City Council meeting night and they were talking about allocating city money for architectural design work for the skywalk and bullshit, bullshit, bullshit, and I got really a little hot under the collar. What the hell is going on here? So I was outside and [Councilman] DiBella comes up to me and goes, 'What's your problem now?'"

[William DiBella was a graduate of Bulkeley High School and Central Connecticut State University. He also attended New England Institute of Mortuary Science, and was elected to City Council in 1971.]

"I said to DiBella, 'Who's going to pay for all of that? How can you allocate all that money for something that nobody even approved or knows about or talked about?' DiBella said, 'It's all reimbursable from the Department of Transportation, cool your jets.' Okay, so, it wasn't going to cost the city any money. Well, that was in about April 1978.

"In June we went down to a 'National People's Action' conference in Washington, D.C. and we set up a side meeting while we were all down there with the Department of Transportation, with the people who were supposed to pay for this. In that meeting, it came out that no, the Department of Transportation hadn't contracted with Hartford and that they had absolutely no intention of paying for anything that they hadn't already cut a deal on.

"So we came back from Washington knowing that what DiBella said was wrong. That following week we had a meeting at St. Lawrence O'Toole Church and we brought in the federal transportation guy from Rochester, New York named Altobelli. Jonathan Coleman, the City Planner, and DiBella and Suisman who were both Council members were also there. The skywalk was one half of the agenda. There was another issue that I don't remember at the Behind the Rocks meeting. It was set up in such a way that we got DiBella and Suisman to say up front that this was all reimbursable, that it's not going to cost the city any money. They're going on and on, and people didn't like the idea itself, but then we ask Altobelli, and we say, 'Mr. Altobelli, is the Department of Transportation prepared to pay for all this stuff?' 'No.' People started screaming, 'Liar, liars.' People were just screaming.

"At that point Suisman said, 'We've got to get out of here. We've got to get out of here.' Well, we toasted their ass so bad and the fight was on. Now, that night or previous to that the Council had approved everything: nine:nothing; nine:nothing; nine:nothing. All these architectural expenditures and bullshit, bullshit. This hits the press and they needed approval in the Council like eighty billion times. So finally, we started losing five:four and tried to call that a victory—we moved some people. The thing goes on and on."

The *Hartford Courant* describes the St. Lawrence meeting: "On June 7, 1978 more than one hundred people attended a meeting at St. Lawrence O'Toole Church to make known to city council and federal officials their objections to the proposed Skywalk for downtown Hartford. Under close questioning from HART members it was disclosed that any money now being spent for planning will not be reimbursed by federal funds. A heated exchange between HART members Alta Lash, Frank Garfi, and others and Councilman DiBella revealed that DiBella did not know that federal money was not available for preliminary engineering (\$50,000 to \$100,000) now being done". [18]

The City claimed throughout the Skywalk fight that street-level business would not be hurt by the Skywalk project. However, their own study acknowledged that such shops were indeed forced out of business the first years that Skywalks were in operation in other cities. It is also interesting to note that the company that was commissioned to do the study, the Farley Company, was also the managing rental agent of the American Airlines building and therefore had a financial interest in the

project since the Skywalk was to be connected to American Airlines. Also, DiBella and Suisman were on the Board of Directors of the Downtown Council along with the chairman of the G. Fox Company, the president of Sage Allen, the chairman of United Technologies, the vice president of Travelers, and the vice president of Metropolitan Properties — the developer of the Brown Thompson, which was also a link in the proposed skywalk plan. [99] A full 95% of the merchants on Pratt Street, Asylum Street and Union Place signed petitions opposing the Skywalk. [78]

A HART flyer urged that the money would be better spent to redo streets, provide bus shelters, put up traffic lights, and provide transportation to jobs for neighborhood people. [2]

Lash:

"Now, the city needed three pieces of money. They needed first a grant from Housing and Urban Development. Then they need some Transportation money and then they needed nine hundred thousand dollars on this multi-million dollar skywalk project—this very teensy little piece of it was to come from the State Bond Commission. It's a very little piece. This was all leveraged money. You had to have one piece to leverage the other pieces. Well, we tried first to attack the UDAG (Urban Development Action Grant) on the grounds that UDAG was supposed to be used for urban poor neighborhoods, not a rich skywalk.

"We actually got the deputy secretary of some department in HUD, Richard Embry, over to the Grace Lutheran Church in Hartford to talk about UDAG. We got him here under false pretenses. We told him there were people from all over the country coming to discuss UDAGs. So he flies up, gets to the church. We were a wreck because, of course, here were all these HART people. There was nobody there from outside the city. We put up signs, 'Welcome, Duluth.' I had people come with suitcases, pretending they were from out of town. I was so nervous, and I wouldn't come out because there were a zillion TV cameras and they were all interviewing Embry about the skywalk. Embry realized that he had been set up, even before the meeting started, but he can't go bullshit. I wouldn't come out until the absolute last minute. Embry was sitting at the table waiting for the thing to start and I said, 'Okay, come out and start the meeting,' because I was the one who lied and got him here. So we started and did not make much progress with Embry at that meeting but he probably to this day remembers the meeting.

"The Skywalk was a long campaign. It wasn't months; it was going onto a year."

In October of 1978, hundreds of people gathered at a neighborhood meeting grilling two federal officials on how residents can stop construction of a \$6 million downtown skywalk system, despite Council approval of the project 5-4. South End resident Anne Dellert said the commitment of public funds to the project far outweighs the commitment of private funds and said the situation amounts to 'welfare for corporations and downtown business'. [5]

Lash:

"And so now it was Thanksgiving weekend and the leadership on this issue—mostly from Behind the Rocks was sitting around talking. 'What are we going to do? We got to really crank it up again.' So we decided to

do this petition drive on the Friday after Thanksgiving in November. Well, we really didn't have many troops at this point because it was such a long campaign, so we decided that we would do these petitions downtown where the buses drop people off from north Hartford because we knew that everybody there thought this was a stupid idea. We told the people and the press that the petitions were going to be coming from all over the city—people were going out doing these petitions—when in fact the only people we had were the five or six people at that bus stop. But the press are this issue up and so it once again became a cause to love.

"So the issue got cranked up again. In that December, right after that petition thing, the State Bond Commission was supposed to meet to decide whether or not to give Hartford the nine hundred thousand dollars. So we decided, 'We'll go to the State Bond Commission.' Now, the State Bond Commission is controlled by the governor. It was Ella Grasso. She controlled the Bond Commission. We went to the Bond Commission meeting with some numbers and we started to say, 'You can't vote on this. We want you to hear what we have to say.' Now, on one side you have Nick Carbone and on the other side you have the neighborhood groups. At the time Grasso had a lieutenant governor from Hartford, Bob Killian. Well, Killian decides, when she's going to run for reelection, to challenge Grasso for the nomination and he is supported and encouraged in large measure by Nick Carbone.

"Now, Ella Grasso was not one to forget who tried to do her in and in a split second realized this was a way maybe to get back at her old political foe, Carbone." [Grasso once described Carbone as 'a self appointed leader of Hartford' who has demonstrated 'complete impotence in all of his actions.'] [41]

"So she says, 'The Bond Commission will not vote on this today.' This was in December. She said, 'In fact, I think we need a big public hearing on this for the Bond Commission, and we'll give the neighborhood people a half an hour and we'll give the city a half an hour and they can each explain their side and it will be held in January.' So we are cranking everybody and their brother to go to this public hearing. Meanwhile, the press is phenomenal. This was *the* issue in Hartford. We had people with disabilities. We had the Bishop. We had neighborhood people. We had just a ton of people and there's Ella, in all her glory, clearly pandering to our side.

"In January 1979 we went to the Bond Commission meeting. The business committee throws up Donald Conrad (from Aetna), boring guy, and Suisman, who couldn't explain this issue if his life depended on it. Suisman had a manner about him that was very low key. Even when he was excited he was very low key, and he never got excited.

"So they sent Suisman out to defend the city's position on this. They went first; we went second.

"I'm thinking, 'All right, here comes the vote.' We had hundreds of people up there. Grasso says, 'This is such an important issue, I think we need a week to consider this and to take in all this testimony.' So another week goes by and the press is cranking shit out like interviews in neighborhoods with average Joe's and on and on and on.



Alta Lash leads HART in opposition to state funding for the Skywalk in January 1979. At far left of picture, first row, sits Jack Dollard. On the right, first row, is Center City's Anne Zekas. Note the stern-looking suits in the back left of the photo.

"Now, on our side is basically HART. On the other side is City Hall, the Downtown Council, Aetna, Travelers, the Chamber. I mean they all want this, and then there's us. Well, the next week comes and it's supposed to be the vote and we're a wreck. We didn't know which way it was going to go. We, of course, had been calling members of the Bond Commission, giving them packets and bullshit, bullshit.

"I'll never forget this until I die. It was on the first floor of the Capital and the cop comes up and says, 'All of you people can't go in,' because we had about a hundred people there during the day. He said, 'You can't go in there.' I said, 'What?' He goes, 'We can't let all of you people in there.' So Ella comes down the stairs from her office on the first floor. I said, 'Governor Grasso, they're saying we can't watch.' She said, 'That's ridiculous. Give us a minute to get settled.' So I stand up and say, 'Governor Grasso is going to let us in.'

"So we go up and they sit down around this long table and so she lets everybody in the room. 'Is everybody settled? Everybody comfortable?' There weren't chairs. Everybody was standing and I was standing right above her shoulder. She says, 'Well, let me first say that the business committee in Hartford has been such a wonderful resource. John Filer from Aetna and Pete Thomas from the Hartford Insurance Group. They've always been there whenever I ask, and their contribution to the city of Hartford cannot be underestimated', and I'm like, 'We're in the tank.' 'But this particular project, however, is not one of their best efforts, blah, blah, blah, bullshit, bullshit, bullshit. You could see Suisman going, 'I'm in the toilet. You can see him right there.

"So she goes, 'I think we should proceed to a vote. All in favor of giving the city of Hartford nine hundred thousand dollars for the skywalk signify by saying 'aye.' Dead silence. 'All those opposed, 'nay.' 'Nay, nay, nay, nay.' [gavel sounds] Bonding is denied. All you could hear was me go 'Ah.' All the radio was there. You could hear after that, 'Ah.' That was me.

"Then she stands up to leave and, of course, she always worked the crowd, Mother Ella. She turns around to me and she looked at me and she goes, "Nice doing business with you," because I knew she stuck Nick. That was her only reason to do this, was to screw Nick, because we kept calling it "Carbone's Skywalk." Every time it was Carbone's Skywalk, Carbone's Skywalk. So the guy who took the biggest hit on the skywalk issue was Nick. Carbone's Skywalk. Then she went around and people were kissing her. Oh, it was wild. Wild!"

Lash:

"Carbone was not at the meeting; he had pulled out by this time. He was smart. If you know there's going to be a funeral, you don't want to have all the cameras go, "Well, what do you think now, Mr. Carbone?").

The *Hartford Courant* account of this meeting read as follows: In January of 1979, the State Bond Commission met and unanimously rejected the proposed \$6 million Hartford skywalk system. Governor Grasso, chair of the committee, swiftly dealt their blow to the project before an audience of city neighborhood residents at a five minute meeting at the State Capitol. HART applauded after the 7-0 vote. Alta Lash, leader of the group that relentlessly lobbied state and federal officials to stop the project, said the outcome proved the neighborhoods are a force to be reckoned with. "The time for a few people at City Hall to run the city is over," she said. Mrs. Grasso said that she believes the project simply is not in 'the best interests of the state'. [3]

Former City Councilman Richard Suisman remembered the Skywalk issue: "HART came along in the mid-70's with the empowerment, which I think is important for neighborhoods. The issue became quickly with them, downtown vs. the neighborhoods. We really looked upon it differently. We felt the downtown area was the generator of the taxes and allow us to do what we need to do in the neighborhoods and school system.

"I was then head of the redevelopment committee and by that time Carbone and Dibella had a major war going with Ella Grasso anyway. It was a \$6 million construction program, connecting Civic Center, Main Street, and towards Union Station, which we had seen out in Minneapolis. They did it because of harsh winters and fear of crime, and thought that a skywalk provided a higher level of comfort, helping the retail area of downtown.

"Grasso had approved it early on, which meant a 10% state match and about \$5.5 million from the Federal government through a transportation grant. Clearly legal and approved by the Federal government. Those funds could not have been used for better bus service or any other mode of transportation. Real estate folks downtown, like David Chase, were going to put up a half a million dollars too. This project would not have cost Hartford taxpayers anything.

"Grasso, after several major battles particularly with the City of Hartford, changed her mind. She was now opposed to it. She and HART got together. It gave her in my opinion cover to oppose the elected officials in Hartford and say that we didn't represent neighborhoods. So she reversed herself. Before the meeting of the state bond committee, she held a hearing for us and HART, which is very very unusual. The com-

mission includes eight or nine of her appointees. It was clear that things were cut and dry there, as she probably met with the commission a couple of days before and told them what she wanted. But anyway we were invited, I went up with Sister Alta Lash to make a presentation. Without a state match, we knew the feds would not fund the program. That ultimately killed the skywalk, over a political difference and opposition from HART.

"I may sound like I'm still hurt by this, as I was closely involved with it, but all and all I think HART was important in educating a lot of people. They sure kept elected officials on their toes. I think they were on the wrong side of the skywalk issue. I think it is important to say that the neighborhoods were being short-changed, not by the city council, but by the state and the region."

Suisman remembered the relationship between Carbone and Grasso:

"Jimmy Carter was in the White House at the time. Grasso used to get calls from the White House, asking what they could do to help Connecticut. One of her responses was 'kill Carbone, don't give him anything...' She was a great, great politician ..." [192]

After the vote, the city administration urged that Hartford proceed with the plans. Councilman Dibella said that city officials were worried that opposition may be so adamant that the state may refuse to even pass through the \$3.1 million in federal funds. [8] City officials were pessimistic enough about the state's re-sponse following the vote that they canceled a February 1, federally mandated public hearing. [9]

Twenty years later, a somewhat reticent Carbone described his role with the Skywalk fight, saying that early in the campaign he called HART director Jack Mimnaugh and asked him to rally community opposition to the skywalk. The reason for that, according to Carbone, was that he wanted to pass a tax break (called the differential) to benefit Hartford homeowners. The differential was opposed at that time by the business community, and the skywalk was something that they supported. Carbone thought that if he could get business to relax their opposition to the differential that they might have a better chance at winning the skywalk as a result of their 'good will' towards the community. [198]

HART leader Brigitte Poulin:

"Even though residents and Carbone differed on this issue, I think HART and Nick contributed to Hartford, in retrospect, in a lot of different ways. The man had and still has a tremendous facility for facts and figures. You didn't go up against Nick unless you had your stuff down."

Mimnaugh:

"Apart from the issue itself, what the Skywalk issue did was establish the principal that nobody had better think about doing anything major in the city of Hartford, whether it's downtown or anywhere else, unless you consult with neighborhood people and bring it out in the open."



ELLA GRASSO
GOVERNOR

STATE OF CONNECTICUT
EXECUTIVE CHAMBERS
HARTFORD

January 24, 1979

Alta Lash
Hartford Area's Rally Together
44 Barnard Street
Hartford, Connecticut 06114

Dear Alta Lash:

Thank you for your letter concerning the "Skywalk" project for downtown Hartford.

As you know, this matter generated a great deal of interest within the Hartford community. The State Bond Commission reviewed and considered many letters on the subject before making their decision. As a result of a careful evaluation of the many factors involved in this proposal, the commission voted to reject this item at their January 12, 1979 meeting.

I appreciate being apprised of your concerns on this matter.

With best wishes,

Cordially,

Ella Grasso
ELLA GRASSO
Governor

Lash:

"The Travelers insurance executive said, 'Oh, what, every time we want to do something in Hartford we've got to check with HART?'"

Mimnaugh:

"That's exactly what happened. In fact, when the riverfront (of the Connecticut River, bordering downtown Hartford) was being developed, I remember (Councilwoman) Barbara Kennelly was sitting at Riverfront meeting and saying, 'Okay, we got all the corporate votes here. Has everybody cleared this with HART?' And then she came to the HART Congress and said, 'I never thought I would ever say that,' but she said, 'it is very clear now that nothing gets done in the city of Hartford of that magnitude unless people understand that they've got to check with neighborhood people now."

"And that's what the skywalk fight did. I don't think the city of Hartford today, certainly everyone who runs for Council now understands it and they run pretty much on neighborhood agendas. No one would

think, including the business community now, of trying to do something of a real big magnitude without knowing that it is bad for them to do it without consulting, at least, and asking the neighborhoods, 'Do you want in? Do you have any opinion on this?'" [204]

Footprints: DiBella Remembers Lash

"Every time Alta appears she's worthwhile. She's excellent. She's probably the best I've ever seen. Don't tell her I said that about her."

At one meeting when DiBella was on City Council, Lash said that DiBella had been invited that he said he knew nothing about.

DiBella called her a liar in front of a whole crowd of people. DiBella:

"Oh, I remember. [laughs] She and I used to go at it like cats and dogs. She was tough. And HART was tough. I probably did call her a liar. In fact, I can remember looking at her, and she didn't like that too much. But Alta and I had our ups and downs. She's a person that I did have an awful lot of respect for. She made me apologize for calling her a liar. I apologized. Whether I was right or wrong, I'd apologize to her because she's too tough." [213]

Footprints: More Classic Alta

"Alta Lash was a classic," remembers early HART organizer and director David McKinley. "I remember one meeting down at the Hyland Park Center. It was a meeting with maybe thirty-five or forty people, and it had to do with some crime issues — neighborhood improvements. And Antoinette Leone was one of the invited guests. She was a City Council member at the time. She got up to respond to a list of questions. Alta wasn't involved with running the meeting. She was standing in the back room, and Antoinette was going on, responding, and she was hemming and hawing, not really responding clearly to the issues. Well, Alta slowly folded her arms, and just looked at her, and as soon as Antoinette saw that she started backtracking. 'Well, let me explain myself more clearly now.' Then Alta would just take one step forward, and stare at her, and just that was enough to get Antoinette Leone to backtrack. Antoinette happened to be someone who I think was totally in awe of Alta's guts and her forcefulness, and probably wished that she had some of it herself." [206]

HART Gives Birth

Following the successful efforts to create a neighborhood identity and to move attention from downtown, another theme of HART activity in the early years (1976-1980) might well be called 'the proactive years'. This was the first attempt by HART to build from scratch the neighborhood that its residents wanted. The following detail some HART-initiated projects. Most of this early activity centered on the Park Street and Frog Hollow area.

Southside Institute Neighborhood Alliance (SINA)

Clustered around the fringes of the Frog Hollow neighborhood are three major 'institutions': Hartford Hospital, the Institute for Living, and Trinity College. Since the beginning of HART the relationship between these institutions has ranged from nonexistent to combative to cooperative.

Ivan Backer, Director of the Southside Institute Neighborhood Alliance (SINA):

"In a sense, HART was at least one of the factors that prompted us to start SINA. Because the neighborhood was really not organized, we could not, in any kind of a systematic way, talk to people. When HART had organized its block clubs and Jack Mimnaugh came and said facetiously, 'Well, I've got you surrounded now with block clubs,' we didn't see that as a challenge. We saw it as an opportunity to build a coalition of the institutions and relate to HART. So in 1977, we hired Bob Pawlowski to be our first part-time staff person, and he spent the first few months going around, talking to people about what he might do.

"There were confrontations at the time, and I don't think I'll forget the time when I was invited to a HART Congress. In those early HART days, the favorite technique was to ask a question and to stick a microphone in front of your face and answer 'yes' or 'no' to questions that didn't have a 'yes' or 'no' answer. [laughs] I just remember how uncomfortable it felt, to be put on that spot."

HART community organizer Mike Gorzoch reflected on some of the early confrontations related to development issues and Hartford Hospital, a major neighborhood institution and a SINA member:

"Hartford Hospital, at that time, was starting to embark upon a property buying bonanza. Property values were falling, so the vultures came in, especially at the hospital, which always had grander designs on taking over that whole area. They started to, very quietly, buying up properties, and evicting people using strongarm tactics. So people went, 'What's going on here? We're being thrown out of the neighborhood. The hospital is encroaching.' They started to have a series of meetings, and tried to meet with the hospital and say, 'What are your plans?'

"The first HART meeting I went to as an organizer was where the director of the hospital was invited to talk about what the heck the hospital was doing. We'd tried three or four times to meet with this guy, and he refused to meet with us. One of our options was to go to the hospital, and demand that he meet with us. The group said, 'Okay, we'll go to the

hospital. We're marching on the hospital Saturday.' And this was a Tuesday night — my first HART meeting. Who is going to make the phone calls, and where are we going to get the signs, and who is going to call the press? They hammered it out, and decided that was what they were going to do because the hospital just refused to meet with them. And so Saturday morning came and it was cold. It was November. Television was there, and there we were with our signs, demanding that the hospital meet with us. [laughs] And, of course, they came right out of the building, and we got a meeting. After saying they would meet with us at the earliest convenience, they said, 'Now please get off of our property.' We got a written guarantee from the hospital administrator who came out that they would meet with us within two weeks. [196]

"Near that time members of HART group 'Vecinos Unidos' met with Hartford Hospital planning director Paul Somoza at the South Congregational Church in April of 1979. The block clubs were concerned about the hospital's planning for the neighborhood and the lack of cooperation. Resident Matthew Tallow said that the hospital has no intention to improve conditions in the neighborhood. Ramonita Ortiz said in an article that 'the Spanish community is frustrated with the actions of Hartford Hospital'. [34]

Footprints: Mike Gorzoch

"I had a meeting at night, I was single, and I was living in an apartment on Allen Place. I had no furniture, I had no car. I just ate and drank and slept and organized. One of the block clubs would meet every night. I lived in the neighborhood, and so I worked in the neighborhood, I slept in the neighborhood, I ate in the neighborhood." [196]

In response to the pressure that was being put on Trinity College and Hartford Hospital from HART block clubs, according to Bob Pawlowski, the Southside Institute Neighborhood Alliance was created. Pawlowski worked with SINA very early on, helping first and current director Ivan Backer. Mimnaugh added that "SINA was meant to be an umbrella group of HART, but then Backer did not trust HART enough to do so."

Ivan Backer retired in 1995 after directing SINA for more than 17 years.

Park Street Festival

In 1977 HART provided staff assistance to begin the first of several "Park Street Festivals". The organizing committee was made up of merchants in the city and area block clubs. The newspapers of the time offered the following scene of the first festival, attended by more than 20,000 people:

"Flavored ices, sausage, pizza, bread and pastry were sold at streetside tables, while ethnic dancers and musicians performed on mobile stages. Puerto Rican residents clustered around a stage where several Spanish

music groups played, clad in flowing white outfits with colored sashes... a large crowd of French Canadians gathered under striped umbrellas arranged in the hall of St. Anne's Church, which was decorated to look like a French cake. There were French songs, French wine, cheese, and snacks. A picture of the late and past HART president Simone Soucy, was posted at the front of the hall surrounded by flowers — she had died earlier in the year." [61] There was also Greek, Italian and Polish food and entertainment.



(Inset) Leaders plan for the first Park Street Festival in 1977.
(below) First Park Street Festival, outside new HART office on corner of Park and Lawrence Streets, 1977.



Gorzoch remembers an especially exciting Park Street Festival in 1979:

"We had what the newspaper called a riot after one of the park fests. Above one of the stores was a social club, and they had a drunken party, and the drunken party spilled out into the street, right as the Park Fest was closing, and there was this major over-reaction. It was a long, hot day, and the Park Fest is over, and this fight spills out from this club, down into the street, and some wise guys throw some bricks through some windows, and the next thing you know, Frog Hollow is a mess. It was just one of those things. There wasn't any shooting. There weren't

any knifings going on. It was just the frustrations from the long, hot summer days kind of triggered it, and I remember just sitting outside the HART office as the police were marching with batons, down Park Street, as if it was a major riot or something. I remember the Fire Chief John Stewart, sneaking into the HART office with a walkie-talkie. We're all in there going, "Oh, who cares?" And the next day in the newspaper, it was front page. "Park Fest Ends in Riot." As if bodies were all over — it was a major over-reaction by the press and the police. We were able to get a front page retraction from the *Hartford Courant* for blowing things out of proportion.

"The Park Fest was incredible. There was a sea of people, from Zion Street down to Washington Street. Just a sea of people. We had three or four different bandstands of music going all day. Food. It was a hot day in the summertime. It was just a fantastic day." [196]

In 1995, Park Street merchants revived the 'Park Fest', drawing more than 40,000 people to celebrate the Park Street area.

Southside Neighborhood News

The idea for a neighborhood newspaper began in fall of 1976 from members of HART's Center City Coalition. With residents from Behind the Rocks, Parkville, Vecinos Unidos and Barry Square, a newspaper committee was formed. Bob Pawlowski, who was working with the three Frog Hollow institutions, was hired to help. The first board of directors for the *Southside News* included: president Anne Zekas of Center City, Eleanor Calafiore, Mayre Cerra, Lebaron Moseby, Sid Wainman of Hartford Hospital, Emil Sapere of the Institute of Living, Larry Bodner, Sandi Garfi, Jack Santos, Ann Jacobs, Rosiland Strickland, and Bud Emanuelson.

The paper was located at the HART office at 660 Park Street. Juan Fuentes, editor of 'El Observador', Hartford's Spanish language newspaper of the time, provided production assistance to the young *Southside*. The first edition came out on August 3, 1977 with a front page story on auto insurance, an issue on which HART was working. The editorial policy, according to early mastheads, was independent of any one organization. [69]

Footprints: Bob Pawlowski

Pawlowski:

"While we were doing Park Street Festival we used to always have meetings here (at 'Sherry's Bar', the current 'Camila's en la calle Park', run in 1995 by Pawlowski and his brother-in-law). We'd come here and say, "Well, this is a great business. A great bar and grill. Great woodwork and everything, and the former owner is just letting it go. Wouldn't it be great to get it someday."

Describing his time with HART, Pawlowski said, "I didn't always agree with everything (that happened at HART), but the experience was stimulating. Stimulating experience, intellectually, personally, totally, very stimulating."

"The *Hartford Courant* especially", remembers Pawlowski, "was giving the neighborhood a really bad rap. There were several things that the *Courant* wrote that people thought were really distorted. You know, really beating the neighborhood down." Lee Paquette, part of the original sponsoring committee of HART and hired as the first editor of the *Southside News*, said 'we wanted to report things that the *Hartford Courant* at the time was ignoring.'

In 1987 *Southside News* was renamed the *Hartford News*. In 1989 Pawlowski sold the *Hartford News*. Today it is published by John Harden and Lynne Lumsden, who is the daughter of ex-Hartford Chamber of Commerce president and Nick Carbone ally Arthur Lumsden.

Broad Park Development

In October of 1977 HART began creation of a non-profit development organization. This was intended to give neighborhood interests more control over development projects in their sections of the city, including housing rehabilitation and commercial revitalization. Groups involved in the formation of this group included SINA, Center City Coalition, Vecinos Unidos, and the South Central Business and Professional Association. A *Courant* editorial said this would be a 'dynamic means to get development capital without waiting for government grants that often never come.' [38]

Originally called the "Park Street Redevelopment Corporation", Simone Soucey of the Center City Coalition and second HART president said that 'I'm afraid that if things are left up to the influence of outside of the neighborhood, there will be no place for us to live in five years. This way we can reclaim and rebuild our neighborhood the way we want it.'

Broad Park started as a HART member group, and spun off rather quickly. Jack Mimnaugh and Alta Lash discuss the fitful start of this group.

Mimnaugh:

"I think within ten days Broad Park was separate from HART."

Lash:

"It was a difficult labor, a difficult child birth, and a difficult childhood."

Mimnaugh:

"It didn't work from the very first day. It was a disaster from the very first day. It had nothing to do with the structure. It had nothing to do with anything other than conflicting personalities between the Broad Park Executive Director and the HART Executive Director. They hated each other, so there was absolutely no possibility that HART and Broad Park, even though they were designed to work in collaboration with each other, from the very first day that it started, were going to work. (Former HART organizer Jesse Ackerman was the director of Broad Park and Wayne Johnson was the director of HART).

"The structure of Broad Park was that the board for Broad Park would be elected at the HART Congress. That's how tightly controlled Broad Park was meant to be. Their board would be accountable to the HART board throughout the year. They had to give reports monthly to the HART board. After one year, Wayne just said, 'I don't want any-

thing to do with them.' People would say, 'But Wayne, the constitution of HART and blah, blah, blah.' 'Well, change it then. I don't want anything to do with them. Let them elect their own board. Let them do whatever they want. I don't want anything to do with them.' So the first year then HART just sent them off on their own.

"The leaders got caught in the middle. It got very problematic because the first board was, in fact, elected by HART and there were a lot of wonderful HART people who joined the board. Wonderful HART people. These were solid neighborhood people, who joined Broad Park because they thought it was going to be wonderful and they were loyal to Broad Park then because that was the group that they were on the board of. They got caught in the middle. Both executive directors tried to explain their positions in terms other than personal animosity. You know, like there was some real logic to why they couldn't work together, and it was nothing but personality. So I think neighborhood people really got burnt on that one." [204]

Ruth Forrest was on the board of Broad Park for 10 years. "There were a lot of problems when Broad Park was first created", Forrest recalls, "both with turf and decisions on which buildings would get done. As bad as some areas of the neighborhood are, I'm definite that Broad Park has made a difference".

Broad Park Development Corporation operates today at a new office on the corner of Broad and Park Street, under the direction of Ross Burkhardt.

Casa Nueva apartments

Vecinos Unidos successfully pushed for the development of the Casa Nueva apartment buildings, still operating today on the corner of Broad and Russ Streets. This building renovation was the first in Hartford to employ 'checkerboard rehabilitation', where residents were moved from unit to unit until all were repaired. This ensured that people would have a place to stay once the project was complete.

Mimnaugh:

"We wanted the buildings done in such a way that people would not be displaced—the developers wanted to do them all at once and we said, 'No, no, no, no, no. Do one building and then move this tenant from here to there.' They said, 'No, that's going to raise construction costs.' We said, 'We don't care. Do it that way because that's the only way people are going to feel confident that they, in fact, are going to get the apartments, the ones who live here now. Secondly, it's the least amount of disruption for the families. So it's a little inconvenient for the construction folks—so be it.'

"They fought us on it, but we prevailed and we had it done the right way."

The account of Casa Nueva construction from the *Courant* included the following: A group of Hartford residents, distrustful of the city's plans for housing rehabilitation in that area and angry over lack of progress, gathered on Broad Street in September of 1978 to demand speedy action by the corporation overseeing the

work. The Public Housing Corporation, the authority established to oversee such projects, had been working with the residents of Lawrence and Broad streets to get rehabilitation money for seventy-eight apartment units in the area. Federal funds for the project have been approved, but the work had not yet begun. Joe Garcia, with Vecinos Unidos, said Director Arthur Anderson promised the group that work would begin in September.

"September is almost gone," said Garcia. "No work is going on, and now they are talking about postponing the work until spring."

Garcia said another winter with the dilapidated buildings will mean more of the fires that have plagued the area and the added miseries of another winter of rats and roaches.

"We say Mr. Anderson should be replaced if he can't get the job done," Garcia said. [77]

Alta Lash:

"Vecinos Unidos had a meeting with Governor Ella Grasso. They wanted bond money for that Casa Nueva project, and again it was City Councilman Richard Suisman. The city was giving them (Vecinos Unidos) so much shit, so they set up a meeting with Grasso and Suisman got invited to that meeting by Grasso. I remember them sitting there, all these Latino folk and Mother Ella. She treated them like gold. They explained the problem and she turns to Suisman and goes, 'Dickie, is that true what these people are saying?' And Suisman's like, 'Da, da, da.' Bond money for Casa Nueva in the bag." [204]

HART leader Brigitte Poulin:

"So, we presented our case to Governor Grasso. She's a good lady and she didn't put up with any shenanigans. I remember Dick Suisman had made an error, and she corrected him, I mean, in no uncertain terms. She said, 'You are absolutely wrong, and it was very close to a lie what you told me.' She was a tough lady."

This successful project, said a *Courant* editorial from May 1980, 'shows that re-birth is possible if local groups plant the seeds and if the city, state, federal government and private sector are willing to provide the capital to water and make them grow.' [63]

Ramonita Ortiz was an organizer with Vecinos Unidos at the time:

"Casa Nueva is still in good condition — it's not like some of the housing that they develop that in two years is run down again. It still seems a strong apartment building, even to this day. Candido Del Moral was a volunteer then, and still lives at Casa Nueva. He talks proudly even today about his involvement with the organization. That was a good experience. We were having fun and getting positive results."

One-for-One Replacement Housing Ordinance

In 1979 Vecinos Unidos fought for what at the time was a significant piece of housing policy. Because of Vecinos Unidos efforts, the City Council passed a resolution in which the city agreed not to approve the construction of any more upper or upper-middle income housing unless a corresponding number of low income units were created. [71]

Billings Forge apartments

This fight was one of the first where white homeowners and primarily low income Puerto Rican residents worked to promote a specific neighborhood development project. The 'Billings Forge' project was led by residents mostly from Babcock and Hungerford Streets and from Vecinos Unidos. (At nearly the same time, Vecinos Unidos was taking the lead on the Casa Nueva apartment project, with support from the block clubs on Hungerford and Babcock Streets).

Ruth and Ron Forrest of Hungerford Street: "We received money from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development to get Billings-Forge rehabilitated. Hungerford Street and Babcock street spearheaded that effort. It was an empty factory up until 1981." (One hundred and ten years earlier in 1872, Charles Billings and Christopher Spencer built this 'drop forging' facility on the corner of Russ and Lawrence Street). "It was also a big mess and hazard, an eyesore. We couldn't have done it without HART. It took a lot of work to accomplish that, and a lot of people thought we couldn't do it." [79]

This funding came from an Urban Development Action Grant, and included funding for the newly created Broad Park Development to run a homeownership program.

Vecinos Unidos: Job Training and Placement

Vecinos was very successful in linking area residents with positions available for job training and placement. "We worked hard to get jobs for neighborhood residents," said Ramonita Ortiz. Some examples include:

Chamber of Commerce, 1980.

A proposed \$1.3 million job training program for 105 Spanish-speaking people in Hartford was in jeopardy. The Chamber of Commerce had committed itself to raising \$275,000 from the business community to get matching grants totaling \$1 million to fund the program. The Chamber had raised only \$67,000 with three days before the deadline. "Many Puerto Ricans are unemployed because we have not been given the equal opportunity to work and there has been no commitment from Hartford area employers to hire Puerto Ricans", said a statement released by Vecinos Unidos. Claiming the Chamber had been successful in raising money for more expensive projects, Vecinos Unidos said Puerto Ricans are victims of job discrimination by private companies. [64]

One hundred and fifty people marched on the Chamber at their downtown offices. The Chamber President was irate, but the next day he called the HART office saying he would provide the training program. [101]

Aetna Insurance

In 1981 thirty members of Vecinos Unidos rallied inside Aetna Life and Casualty's headquarters, seeking jobs for Hispanics. The group left after company officials assured them their pleas would be considered. "You are not going to walk in here any time you feel like it and demand to see Mr. (John) Filer (Aetna Chief Executive Officer)," an assistant vice president said to the group. "When the group agreed to submit their demands in the form of a letter, the vice president said, 'I guarantee you, I will answer it.'" [65]

As a result, numerous Hispanics were referred by HART and hired by Aetna.

Footprints: Ramonita Ortiz

"I came to this country during the fall of 1972. My daughter Yolanda was six months old, and I had been married for only a year. I was unemployed at the time, and lived in a subsidized apartment at the Stowe Village housing complex.

"Life in this complex was very different from what I was used to on the island. In Puerto Rico most people own their houses. There, we are more than neighbors — we're an extended family. I could only endure there for three years.

"When my son Greg was two we moved to an apartment in Frog Hollow. During that time I met Luz Santana with Vecinos Unidos. I also met Marta Garcia, who was involved in the issue around the first buildings taken over by Broad Park Development (corner of Zion and Park Streets). I remember these years with excitement and pride.

"I remember the Linden building on Main Street and the displacement of its residents during the Carbone and 'Bishops' era when the city decided to move the poor away from downtown Hartford. Those families did not leave without a good fight. We lost the Linden building, but were able to get some moderate income apartments at the new Congress Street redevelopment project.

"We did a lot to help families have decent housing. Once I remember riding in a bus loaded with families from the neighborhood to the owner of some bad Washington Street buildings. Those families were paying rent for apartments infested with rats and roaches. Children were bitten by these rats and the absentee landlord's only worry was to collect his rent. We were very successful in mobilizing residents to get results from the city and absentee landlords."

Pratt and Whitney

Pratt and Whitney landed several major contracts for aircraft engines. Vecinos Unidos took busloads filled with 400 people to Pratt. Vecinos Unidos received more than 150 positions at Pratt and Whitney for Puerto Ricans at \$6 an hour, after months of negotiations to ensure that not only openings, but job training, would be provided. [71]

Public Policy Changes

Massage Parlor Regulation

In 1977 HART neighbors from the South End began work on regulating massage parlors that were creeping in the community. At a June 13 meeting more than 200 people came out to a meeting on the subject. Later that month a large crowd of fifty South End residents packed the City Council to support passage of an ordinance introduced by (Councilperson) Barbara Kennelly to regulate Hartford's massage parlors. "We know what goes on in massage parlors," read one of the many signs papering the room, "And we don't like it!" Brian McDonald of the Barry Square Neighborhood Association said that the 'area has been infiltrated by three massage parlors, two X-rated movies, one porn shop and an increase in prostitution and drug traffic.' The ordinance included regulations on fees, advertising, licensing and health standards. [44] This forced massage parlors to either become legitimate or close down. [69]

Frog Hollow Office Conversion

Residents on Hungerford, Russ and Broad Streets in Frog Hollow faced growing conversion of housing into offices and the transformation of the neighborhood into a 'legal ghetto', according to a 1979 article written by Ron Cretaro, Hungerford Street resident and later president of HART. Cretaro wrote about the conversion process:

"Many attorneys have bought property for investment purposes. He/she allows the building to run down, neglecting improvements and repairs while collecting rents at a higher price than the previous owner. The speculator will then sell the building for a large profit. This is displacing neighborhood residents, denying them affordable housing. Most are elderly and Hispanic. One such attorney is the former Republican Town Chairman of Hartford, who bought a six family house on Hungerford Street for \$50,000 and sold it later to other attorneys for \$64,000. The tenants there were all Hispanic. Other attorneys buying properties include former law partner of Mayor Athanson and the President of the West Hartford Board of Education. His vacant lot has remained an eyesore for years. He is waiting, as are many other absentee lawyers owning area property, to cash-in on the windfall from the parking rights to be paid when the State constructs a new 'Superior Court' complex. One attorney said he will buy any property he wants, and would 'bulldoze the row house to create parking if necessary'. Since 1977 (in a period of one year), 37 units of housing have been lost on Hungerford Street alone through the demolition or conversion to office space. Hungerford residents have submitted proposed zoning variances to restore the residential classification to the street." [36]

Community organizer Mike Gorzoch:

"Hungerford Street had some really good leaders. Ruth Forrest, Bob Pawlowski, Ron Cretaro. The lawyers just were buying up everything, using property rights and everything else, and saying, 'Hey, we have a right to do anything we want.' Meanwhile, the fear was that the lawyers were going to create a ghost town. That whole neighborhood was going to be nine-to-five neighborhood, and at night no one would be there. Every slumlord tactic known to man was being employed by the lawyers to drive people out of the neighborhood and drive them out of the buildings, and then take the buildings over and buy them and rehab them for offices.

"Attorney C. Michael Budlong was one such slumlord. I'm sure you've seen his ad. You've seen him on television. He was an S.O.B. He bought some property, and he just said, 'I'm doing anything I want.' And he happened to be right in the middle of the neighborhood, and it was a critical one, and he needed some variances to do what he wanted, and we wanted to meet with him. And he just said, 'Up yours. I don't have to talk to you.' So he was the worst of the lawyers that employed slumlord tactics to drive tenants out. He bought that building. So we just kept demanding that he meet with us, and he refused to meet with us. So Hungerford decided, 'Well, we've got to go to him. He won't come to us.'

"So we went out to his neighborhood, on Scarborough Street, and flyer'd his neighborhood, informing his neighbors that he was a jerk. The man was a slumlord, our flyer read, and had so many housing code violations on these properties, and we wanted you to know that he refuses to talk to the people to whom he is doing this damage. Budlong went crazy. He'd say, 'I'm suing every one of you. Every one of you are going to be in court.'"

And everybody stood there — there were about a dozen people — and they stood up to him and said, 'Go ahead. Take us to court.' And he tried to intimidate them. People wrote their names, addresses, phone numbers and gave them to Budlong. 'Here. Sue me. Sue me.' We knew it was all hot air. He threatened — sent letters and everything. He couldn't sue. He didn't have the grounds

to sue. Everything we did was legal. He finally just disappeared. We continued with the changing of the zoning laws, and created a number of obstacles so that the lawyers couldn't do a wholesale conversion." [196]



Residents protest conversion of Hungerford Street homes to offices in the streets and at City Hall.

In June 1979 the City Council voted unanimously to down-zone a part of Frog Hollow in order to maintain a residential environment. The council passed five ordinances to prohibit the proliferation of offices along Hungerford Street, located just south of the state Capitol and west of the Superior Court building on Washington Street. This was the first time the city was ever down-zoned. "It's an overwhelming victory for the neighborhood", said Ruth Forrest, a resident of Hungerford Street for more than thirty years. [43]

While a number of Hungerford Street properties were converted to office space, the residential dwellings there today would not have lasted without the work of HART.

Footprints: Ruth and Ron Forrest

"We had a number of calls to buy our property, but we never wanted to sell. Every house here on Hungerford Street has changed owners at least once in the past twenty years — except for ours! Our home was built back in 1886 by a German named Mr. Kronsberg. We bought it from his son back in 1960. We're just the second owners!"

Another thing our Hungerford Street Block Club did was get the city to plant a number of Bradford pear trees on our street. The flowers are beautiful in April and May. I think we have the prettiest street in Hartford because of those trees, and without them I don't think we'd still be here. That's how important they are to us. Bud Emanuelson was important in getting the trees and also in their maintenance. He would prune them and get after any kids who would be pulling on branches.

"We thrived on all of this activity, and loved even more the accomplishments. We really helped to stabilize the area, and we think HART today is still making positive things happen." [208]

Frog Hollow Arson Prevention

In October of 1980 a group of forty Frog Hollow residents met with representatives of three Hartford insurance companies who, along with other businesses, were at the same time fighting HART on a critical tax bill for homeowners being considered at the state. At this meeting the insurance companies pledged to take steps so that some properties would lose their insurance coverage because residents said they are likely targets for arsonists. HART listed seventy-five buildings that could become targets of 'arson for profit' with the owners reaping insurance benefits if the building is destroyed by fire. All of the buildings were owned by absentee landlords, and were abandoned or dilapidated.

Wally DiSanto, a member of the State Insurance Commission, told the group that the list of buildings would be sent to the Insurance Commissioner Joseph Mike so that the companies that insure those properties could inspect them. DiSanto said, "Owners' failure to correct problems that might lead to arson would provide a basis for cancellation of the insurance policy on that property." Residents applauded DiSanto's remarks. They continued to applaud as representatives of Aetna, Middlesex

Mutual and Travelers gave similar assurances. Hartford Fire Chief John Stewart reported that there were more than fifty fires in Frog Hollow since June 1980 (a five month period). [25] It is not certain if any policies were ever pulled, as the insurance companies did not want to share what they considered confidential information.

Gorzoch:

"That summer there were a number of arsons in Frog Hollow, and it was pretty much the basic pattern. Investors buying a multi-family building — an apartment unit — and then selling it to each other within a corporation to inflate the value of the property. And then insuring it every time it was sold — insuring it for the new sale price and the value, and then bringing in bad tenants and using slumlord tactics to drive out the new tenants, and then eventually, a fire would occur, and there would be an insurance payoff. This happened all over New England and in these industrial towns.

"We were able to start targeting buildings and working with tenants, and starting to predict when a building was likely to be torched. And it was almost within six months or eight months that we were able to bring into a meeting — meet with a slumlord — and say, 'We believe that your building is going to probably be torched because of all these indicators.' And we'd make it very public." [196]

Footprints: United Connecticut Action for Neighborhoods (UCAN)

In the winter of 1978, during a time of tremendous HART activity, NETCCO sponsored a conference in Providence, RI at St. Rocco's Church. There were people from New Britain, New Haven and Bridgeport, CT who all said that they wanted organizing in their towns, but that the Campaign for Human Development would only fund one proposal. Then a blizzard hit. People were holed up for several days. In that time, they began writing a joint proposal and realized they needed some Connecticut-based assistance to move forward. This, according to Mimnaugh, (who was not at the conference) was the creation of United Connecticut Action for Neighborhoods. The group soon asked Mimnaugh to help, who in turn talked Alta Lash into being the director of UCAN.

By the early 1980's UCAN-supported creations included Citizens for Action in New Britain (CANB), Organized Northeasterners Clay Hill Arsenal Neighborhood (ONE CHANE), and Asylum Hill Organizing Project (AHOP), the latter two located north of Capitol Avenue in Hartford. [84]

HART Goes to the State Capitol

Another theme of the early HART years pushed issues at the State Capitol, located just two blocks away from the Frog Hollow community. Many of the residents involved in these fights were from outside Frog Hollow, including Behind the Rocks, Parkville, Barry Square, South End and South West. The fight that follows, 'one that needs to be fought again,' says Mimnaugh in 1995, was around automobile insurance rates.

Auto Insurance

HART attacked auto insurance at a meeting with 400 people on a June 28, 1977. State Insurance Commissioner Joseph Mike was the guest.

Saybrooke Street resident and HART president Brigitte Poulin said:

"The issue, at the time, was that accidents were assessed on the zip codes where the accident took place. If you took into consideration that seventy thousand people drove into Hartford at that time, congestion became a big issue. The insurance commissioner, at that time, just couldn't understand how that could have an impact on Hartford rates. If two Avon residents had an accident in front of the State Capitol, the accident was assigned to 06106 zip code (called territorial rating)." Annual insurance premiums at the time were \$140-200 more in Hartford than surrounding towns.

In August 1977, Mike indicated that he wasn't impressed by the charge made by members of HART that much of the blame for the higher accident rate in the city goes to the suburban drivers who clog its street, pour into the city for business, shopping, medical attention, or entertainment. 76,000 of 120,000 jobs in Hartford go to those from the suburbs. 'If you live in Hartford you're more likely to get into an accident that is going to cost your insurance company more money than if you lived in East Hartford or Avon,' said Mike.

Mike and his department were blamed for stalling when they didn't announce a quick solution to the problem. A group of residents stormed out of a meeting with him in July 1977, with Rich Zytka of Crescent Street saying they wanted him to find the answers to our questions in one month. "In one month they're going to get garbage," said the thirty year old commissioner Mike. [15] Resident Joe Scollo of Standish Street chided Mike for what he saw as an unnecessary delay in checking out the situation. "You're giving us the runaround." Some of these questions posed to Mike included: how many cars are in Hartford daily, where do accidents take place, what time of day do they occur, and how many accidents in Hartford involve suburban drivers. [69]

Several times during that year residents demonstrated the effect of traffic congestion that leads to inequitable auto insurance rates. Poulin described one such action:

"One of the most famous ones involved some really good organizers. There used to be a statue that was right in front of the State Capitol. You used to have to go around the statue. At 4:30 p.m. we decided to stall, well, no, there was a car that stalled. It so happened we were picketing at the same time over there. So, traffic was jammed right in front of the commissioner's office for about four hours. But we set some pretty tough standards as far

as picketing. There must have been about forty people, and there were at least forty state police and Hartford police cars at the time.

"It [the insurance issue] was important to me because it was a financial thing, and I didn't like to be told that I paid a price for living in the city, which you always continually heard. At the time I took my two kids with me to the protest, who were six and seven. My husband's parting words were, 'If you get arrested, don't count on me for bail.' That had my kids concerned, but I think it laid groundwork for the way my kids react to situations today. It was a formative time then where community groups were empowering people." [218]

At a Barry Square meeting with 150 neighbors in September 1977, a representative of Governor Ella Grasso, Jeremy Weingast promised to take complaints on insurance rates back to the Governor. Resident John Barnicle complained that

'we've been unable to get any real statistics out of the insurance department.' Many seniors complained that their insurance had been canceled because of their age, or that their rates were astronomical even though they only used their cars to go to the store. [12]

Governor Grasso met with representatives from HART on October 11, 1977 and agreed to two important steps: [1] that the Insurance Department should hold a night time hearing on the subject of auto insurance; and [2] that the State Insurance Commissioner Joseph Mike be given enough staff assistance to compile adequate data to evaluate the present system which requires Hartford drivers to pay substantially more than suburbanites for auto insurance. [11]

State Senate President Pro Temp Joseph Fauliso of Hartford and Senate Majority Leader Joseph Lieberman of New Haven (in 1995 a U.S. Senator for Connecticut) told a gathering of 600 residents at the HART Congress that

Footprints: Brigitte Poulin

Brigitte Poulin was elected to replace Ann Jacobs as HART President, who had resigned in July of 1978. In an article from early August 1978, Jacobs said, "There is no solving of problems any more." She attributed this to a lack of communication and internal conflict with HART. [72]

Poulin:

"I was chosen to be president of HART because I was active on a lot of issues, and I was unafraid. When you truly are convinced that you are right on issues, it helps you in your convictions. I think that if you can stand there and truly defend an issue and feel it from the bottom of your heart — that kind of commitment can help it be good. [218]

"Oh, a legacy. A legacy is an important thing. I think at the time we were — we didn't keep scrapbooks. My kids tease me about that. We just didn't. It wasn't a question of personal aggrandizement. It was a question of do or die. So, legacy, I guess that we were not afraid. We took on tough issues, tough people" [218]

At the Fourth Congress outgoing HART president Brigitte Poulin said that "We as one of the largest, most effective neighborhood groups in the country have proven at times we are more familiar with the issues and needs of neighborhoods than elected officials. HART has proven you can fight City Hall and win." [48]

they may push for a new system of automobile insurance rates based on an individual's driving record, not where one lives. This HART Congress had the aura of a convention hall, with the walls plastered with posters and delegates from various city neighborhoods sitting in rows marked off by towering picket signs naming various block clubs. [14]

Joseph Mike of the Insurance Commission asked Brigitte Poulin to be a member of the department's commission studying the problem. "Somehow," said Poulin at a public hearing, an unofficial position on a subcommittee doesn't seem too productive." [13]

While Commissioner Mike agreed to several small changes in the administration of auto insurance, the major fight to eliminate territorial ratings for auto insurance was not successful.

1978/9 Property Tax Revaluation and Classification

At the 1978 HART Congress, City Council Majority Leader Nick Carbone told those worried about the tax revaluation being worked on by the city (the first in seventeen years) that residents may end up paying 60 to 100% more taxes. When the audience howled, he yelled at the top of his voice, 'you want someone to tell you the truth, or do you want someone to lie to you?' Carbone said he would help HART groups lead a fight at the General Assembly to press for passage of legislation that would allow a shift of tax burden from residents to business. [14]

Tax bills were sent to homeowners on November 17, 1978. On the following Monday, hundreds of angry Hartford residents called the city's tax assessor office. At a series of public meetings, Carbone encouraged taxpayers to revolt and force a change in the property tax system. He said public ire should not be directed at local officials but at the General Assembly, which should change the tax system and provide financial relief. [20] "I can't understand it, said Anthony DiCioccio of 81 Ansonia Street, "I'm ready to fight, I'll tell you. It's near time we revolted against the whole damn thing." [53]

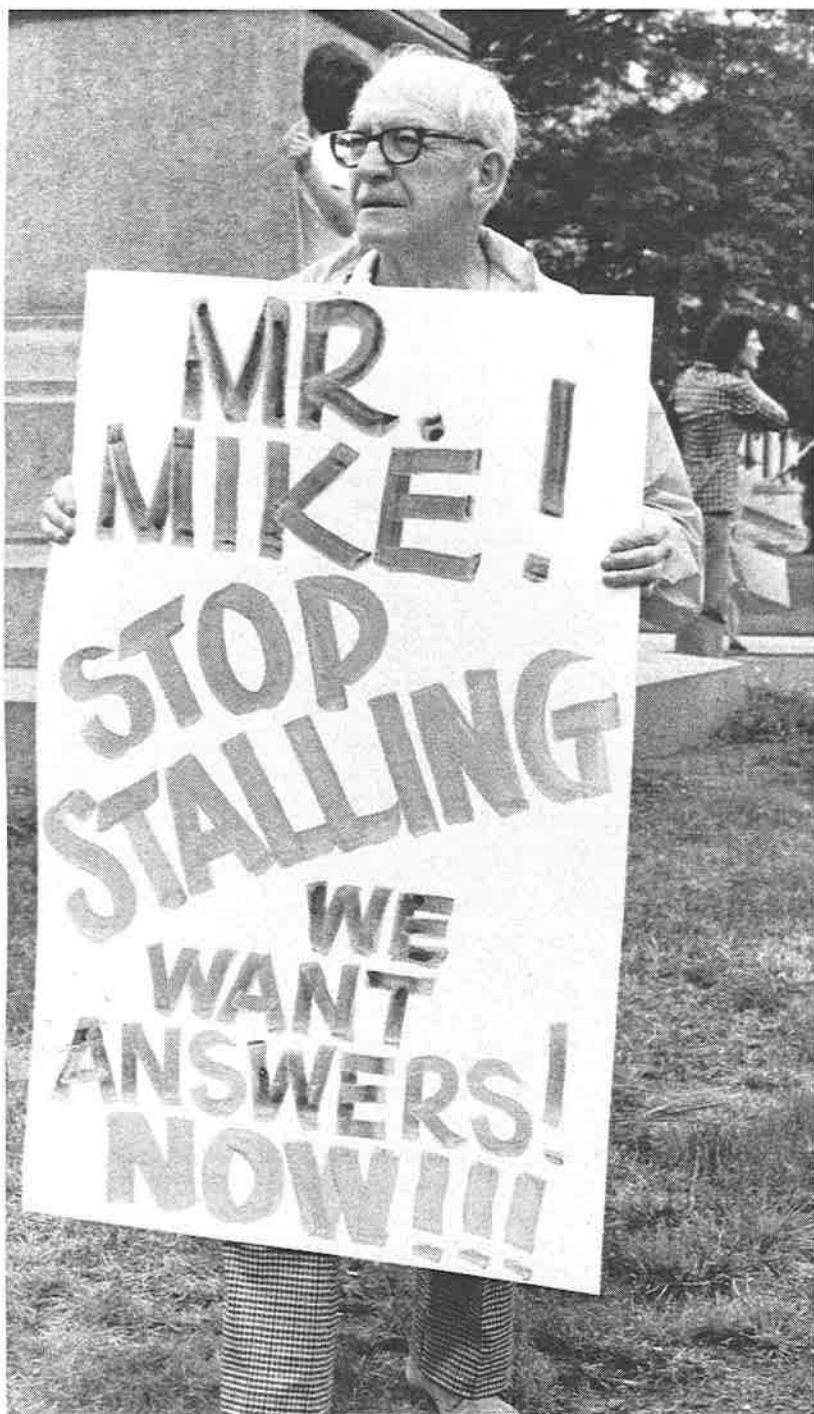
In late November 1978, Carbone pointed to a chart showing the new tax assessment on his home on Hartford's Victoria Road. "I think it's too high," he said. "And I can't take a tax appeal, because if I won everyone would think it was fixed." Carbone's taxes would increase by 35% the next year [less than the average increase]. [19] 800 seething residents attended a Bulkeley High School meeting, most too angry to listen to anything Carbone had to say. The crowd erupted into chaos several times. Carbone tried showing a film outlining ways he believes the state tax system is unfair to residential properties but people in the crowd kept turning on the lights so the film was barely visible and the roar of the angry crowd drowned out the audio portion. [54]

Several weeks later HART issued a statement saying city spending should be curbed before efforts are made to change state tax laws. "Until the City puts its own house in order, efforts at the state would be futile." [21]

Carbone:

"We were under a legal requirement to re-value property by order of the legislature. I wanted to educate the community that the property tax bills in fact would be determined by the State Representatives and the state government. So rather than send out the assessment notices, I sent

Resident protests auto rates in front of State Capitol, August 1977.
In the background is HART organizer Linda Palmerle.



out the property tax bill with the assessment. Everybody's going bull shit. I said, 'Well, come to the State Capitol with me, and we'll pass the bill.' And that's how I got the public support in the city for the differential, a tax break for homeowners. Because I said, 'This is what your bill will be.' Now, I could have avoided that by sending out the assessment notices only. The legislature would meet in January of 1979, and then in July when I sent out the tax bill, everybody will wake up. But by then I'm stuck with it.

"So this was different, and it was my method of enlisting community support, and it's where they wanted to shoot the messenger. I got booed at Trinity because HART had a rally, and HART's rally — the organizers — told everyone, 'We want to throw out the revaluation.' Make Carbone agree to throw out the reval. I said, 'I'm not going to break the law. I'm not going to break the law. I'm not going to throw out the reval. So I'm not going to do what you want.' Boo. Mayor George (Athanson) said, 'Yeah, throw out the reval.' I said, 'Well, I will put it in the legislature. Ask them to change the law,' and that's when I had the differential bill passed.

"I won't go and tell people what they want to hear. I'll tell them the truth. Sometimes when you tell people the truth, they want to kill you. There were people so angry they wouldn't let me do the slide show. They were booing me, wouldn't let me talk. They're going to be pissed off when the bill says the City of Hartford's going to double my taxes. They're going to be angry. But that doesn't mean I can't tell them the truth. That doesn't mean I shouldn't go to them and tell them who is responsible. I mean, what's leadership? Leadership is to educate the public to do the right thing. And to find out who really is causing the injustice." [198]

In 1979 City officials, supported by the lobbying of HART and other groups, got state legislation passed that delayed for two years the shift of the tax burden from business to residential properties as a result of the property revaluation described above. Because of inflation, the severe housing shortage and the way reassessments are conducted, residential property values would have increased far more than commercial in 1979. Without the differential bill, studies said owners would have been taxed an additional 50%, or \$6 million total a year. [17]

FIVE EARLY REACTIONS TO HART

Throughout these major neighborhood campaigns in the middle and late 1970's, numerous so-called neighborhood groups and a frustrated Carbone made a series of attempts to stem the growth and influence of HART. Often these groups were created by the business or political community. Mimnaugh recalls the local political scene and reasons for the blossoming tension between HART and Carbone:

"Carbone was at that time a very innovative politician and he was eager to see how city government could be used to solve problems. The difficulty HART had with Nick was very rarely about specific issues. It was about who was going to set the agenda, and Nick always thought he'd set the agenda and we always believed that the neighborhoods should. We

fought with Nick on some issues, but the real difference was he wanted to be a little dictator and was, all the way through '75, '76, probably '77." [205]

Chris Mellow, who worked with the Hartford Process and the City of Hartford in a variety of capacities said:

"Nick's biggest weakness as a politician was he understood intellectually the need for citizen participation in governance, but he never really understood it on a practical level. So I think intellectually Nick did everything he could to encourage citizen participation, grassroots participation in governance, but Nick was also very much a back room politician and didn't want the grassroots in the smoke filled room when the deals were being cut. Also, Nick—how to say this?—wanted to run the show his way and he didn't really suffer strong contrary opinions. He listened for a while and then bit their heads off, and that ultimately I think was his political downfall—especially in the minority communities where the people he relied on that he allied himself with politically, weren't really independent personalities. They were Nick's creations, to a certain extent and weren't strong and weren't forceful and weren't really leaders in their own right in the community. That's what ultimately brought him down, especially in north Hartford, where he relied people like Abe Giles and Clyde Billington who were professional politicians in the worst sense of the word and not progressive and not bright, were really into politics for their own personal gain. He felt uncomfortable with people having power bases exclusive of his that weren't dependent on him, and that ultimately brought him down. I think that's why he ultimately lost [the 1979 city council election]."

The following are specific ways in which the political and business community reacted to the young HART.

Footprints: Nick Carbone, on the Influence of HART

"I didn't care if ten thousand people came to City Hall. So I didn't necessarily believe neighborhood leaders were always right. An elected official should not give up his good conscience or his judgment to any of them. And whether it's investigating the Police Department on shootings that are wrong, or a zone change that is right. So my job was not to give up my conscience. My job was to exercise my best judgment. Listen to people. Consult with people. So I didn't always do what was popular. I just tried to find out what was right. I didn't do and operate on myth or misinformation. It was my obligation to seek the truth and find the facts, and chart a course that was right. And as a political leader, once you decided on that direction, then you go out and tell people why you made these decisions, and why it was the right decision, and try to get them to change their minds. That's my problem. That's where I get into trouble." [laughs] [198]

1. Kill HART

The first way the downtown and political leaders responded to HART was to try 'to kill it.' Mimnaugh remembers that Carbone became so furious that HART was flourishing and challenging his decisions that he tried to have Mimnaugh bounced out of Hartford. Carbone put in a call to Jack Dollard, who in turn contacted Fr. McDonald. McDonald called Mimnaugh and asked if he and (HART organizer) Ackerman would meet with Carbone. Mimnaugh resisted, saying that he couldn't speak for the organization and that there was nothing to say anyway. After much persuading the Carbone meeting was held.

At the meeting, Mimnaugh and Ackerman were prepared to calmly respond to all of Carbone's questions with, "That's up to the people in the neighborhood." This enraged Carbone, who after the meeting called Chamber President Lumsden and told him to find a way to get rid of Mimnaugh. Lumsden, who played handball with Archbishop John Whealon at the YMCA in Hartford, asked him to have Mimnaugh and HART funding removed.

Although HART had received funding from the Hartford Archdiocese through the Campaign for Human Development, Archbishop Whealon was not a big fan of HART. Fr. Tim Meehan, Frog Hollow native and in 1977 the Director of the Office of Urban Affairs: "Archbishop Whealon was very clear that he wasn't in favor of anything that was an advocacy program using challenging tactics such as those employed by HART. He did not understand the techniques and value of organizing, and that this was a legitimate way for low income people to gain political power. Former Bishop Joe Donnelly, who himself came up through the unions, was very helpful in speaking with Archbishop Whealon about organizing and how it was the only way poor people could be heard."

In HART's first couple of years, Archbishop Whealon was approached by a number of private and public people, including other clergy, to ask that HART not be funded. As much as Whealon did not like HART, he knew he could not justify taking away funds because of the strong evidence that HART was not just a small pocket of rabble rousers. And even though he toyed with the idea of pulling HART funds because the organization was directed by a former priest, Whealon knew that this was not a solid reason. Mimnaugh stayed on the job.

2. Hartford Process/Hartford Neighborhood Coalition

As mentioned earlier, one response to the riots of the late 1960's by the Hartford Chamber of Commerce was an organization called the Hartford Process.

While created several years before HART, it would soon lead to some direct competition. Mimnaugh:

"The Hartford Process was a nonprofit institution put together and paid for exclusively by the business community in Hartford for the purpose of creating a very aggressive agenda on what to do about Hartford. It was corporately dominated. It had on its board also some folks from the City, so City Hall was tied into it. They had a very ambitious agenda with maybe some good intentions. They had ideas about moving significant numbers of people out of Hartford into this little town called Coventry, which is just outside of the Hartford County. What it really had to do with, what they really wanted to some extent was to spread out

the number of minorities moving into Hartford.

"Now saying that in Hartford and the Greater Hartford area that was their agenda, would have meant that any municipality, any political jurisdiction within Hartford County would have raised the red flag and thrown these bastards out on their ass, if they said that out loud. So in order to fulfill their agenda, they decided to go to the first town outside of Hartford County, and they secretly bought up half of the town. This is how ambitious these folks were. They bought up half the town, vacant land, with the intent of building a community like was done in Southern Maryland.

"Anyway, this whole thing blew up. This project was leaked by way of a memo. So Hartford Process was this mega corporation with big bucks behind it. This was, you've got to remember, back in the era with what they called the "Hartford Bishops", which were the chief executive officers of the six or seven major corporations who ran Hartford. They were the money and the brains behind Hartford Process.

"The Hartford Process then had on staff a guy named Sid Gardener, who was a Republican City Councilman at the time. They had the idea that they then, given that they had such a bad reputation in the neighborhoods, would put together a neighborhood coalition. At the time Hartford had what was a history of these civic associations. So every neighborhood in Hartford had the framework of an old civic association. There were I think eleven or twelve of them relating to very small constituencies. They could produce at best five people to a meeting.

"Hartford Process [with support from Carbone and Lumsden] decided to resurrect the civic groups and to provide the staff work for them. So Sid Gardener was assigned full time just to do this. Now, that meant that in the south end of Hartford where HART was supposed to work, there was the Frog Hollow Civic Association, which was made up of three or four French speaking people. Barry Square had a civic association, dominated by a couple of Irish business people and a couple of people from the Democratic Town Committee who were also Irish. There were also the Southeast Civic Association, Parkville, and South West. There was a civic association in every neighborhood.

"Because the staff and help [for what came to be called the 'Hartford Neighborhood Coalition'] were being provided by the business community, we at HART felt clearly that these folks were going to be trained basically to undercut our work. So we separated ourselves apart from that, not only apart from that, but we refused to participate in it, and that was a major, major discussion within HART. It was also a very clear break that HART was going to be different from all these other groups, and within a year we succeeded and all these other groups fell apart. By the time the first annual congress of HART in 1976, the only strong civic groups that remained was the West End, which still exists to this day, and Blue Hills, which still exists today. Those are two remaining remnants of that old system.

"All the others have died, and they died because HART replaced them. HART ended up with large numbers of people, truly grassroots, coming from the bottom, with new people, such as the Puerto Rican community, who were coming into Hartford. These were folks you never

would have thought of involving, and we were successful because we were working hard and making it happen. These other groups just died."

The interaction between the Hartford Neighborhood Coalition and HART was terse and short-lived. An October 6, 1976 letter from the Hartford Neighborhoods Coalition (HNC) to HART says that it would be inconsistent for HNC to attend that year's HART Congress because HNC works city-wide, not just in the south end. [89] At a meeting between HART and HNC in May 1976, an HNC representative said he thought 'the tactics used by HART are divisive and non-productive and without scruples'. [105]

Mimnaugh:

"This [Hartford Process/HNC] was a major, major structural challenge that first year: Was HART going to succeed or was the neighborhood coalition going to succeed in terms of representing neighbors. And we won hands down. They folded their tents and went home, but it was a major issue in that first year."

3. Decentralize City Services

The next early reaction to HART came after Jimmy Carter became President of the United States in 1976. Carbone had some connections with that administration that he used to attract large Federal grants, some of which he wanted to use to decentralize city services into six districts. According to a plan produced by the city in 1976, the city 'would adopt a neighborhood organization strategy which would link service delivery with the citizen/consumer on a geographic basis.' 'A two-tiered citizen participation structure involving the 'Citizen Assembly' [a city-driven 'community group' used to support city decisions on funding of community projects] leaders as a city-wide body and geographically based district advisory councils on another level,' continued the city plan, 'is necessary for the effective operation of such a system.'

"This was a direct attempt", says Mimnaugh, "to create a neighborhood bureaucracy so we couldn't go right to the City Council." The money needed for this plan never came through, and the idea soon fizzled.

4. Citizen's Assembly

A fourth early reaction to stem the growth and influence of HART came in 1977. Mayor George Athanson and Nick Carbone renewed a failed city-run group named the 'Citizens Assembly' to review applications for funding through the federal Community Development Block Grant. Athanson originally felt the selection of membership for the group should be left to existing neighborhood groups, but City Council members felt there wasn't time for that and instructed Athanson to choose three members from each of Hartford's eight assembly districts. HART ignored this process. Neighborhood leader Sandi Garfi of the 'Behind the Rocks' community described this effort as a 'rubber stamp committee'. A letter was sent to City Manager James Daken requesting that HART be recognized as the legitimate voice of the neighborhood. [37]

The Citizen Assembly voluntarily disbanded in 1977 because of a sense of hav-

ing lost touch with the neighborhoods. Athanson: 'I want meaningful citizen participation, not members of the City Hall staff or mayor's staff deciding how this money (CDA) gets used.' At a meeting to discuss the fate of the moribund Citizens Assembly and the state of local political parties, Councilwoman Barbara Kennelly spoke on the importance of citizen participation in government and pointed out that "you people (HART) are almost the other party." [49]

At the same time several HART groups pushed to have federal Community Development Act (CDA) funding used for neighborhood projects, including the Fox School apartments, creation of the Barry Square Senior Center and drainage repairs for streets in Behind the Rocks. These successes, described below, showed that the City's 'Citizen's Assembly' was unnecessary and ineffective.

Fair Share': The Fox School Campaign

Today, on the corner of New Britain Avenue and Washington Street, sits the old Fox Elementary School. In 1975 it was long abandoned and in need of repair. The City proposed knocking it down. Neighbors wanted to save the building.

The 'Fair Share Coalition', formed in November of 1975, included more than ten Center City, Behind the Rocks, and Barry Square block clubs. With \$10,000,000 coming to the City through the Community Development Act (CDA), residents wanted to express priorities, including renovation of Fox Elementary School for a senior living center, low interest home improvement loans, and traffic lights. This fight was a major shift in how decisions were made on CDA funding. To that point Carbone used the 'Citizens Assembly' to put money into organizations that supported him; now, residents asked, "Why not spend it in the neighborhood?"

In January of 1976 more than one hundred residents who wanted a new life for the vacant Fox School were outraged when City Councilmen invited to their meeting didn't attend. The Council originally intended to tear down the school, but after heavy neighborhood pressure agreed to reconsider its decision. [39]

After numerous meeting, negotiations and planning between neighbors and City Hall, the new Fox Manor was dedicated in 1982. It includes ninety units for elderly and people with disabilities. At the grand opening ceremony neighborhood leader Mary Camilleri of Brownell Avenue said, "The great teamwork involved in this is an experience never to be forgotten." State Representative Art Brouillet remarked that 'this building is a symbol of people power'. HART president Jack Berian read a long list of those neighborhood residents whose persistence made the Fox school renovation possible. [105]

Barry Square Senior Center

At a 400 person "Senate" meeting at St. Lawrence O'Toole Church in 1976, members of Center City, Barry Square, Vecinos Unidos, Behind the Rocks and Parkville determined some priorities for use of Community Development Block Grant funding. These included bilingual security guards for Charter Oak Terrace, vacant building demolition, street repairs, and the creation of a senior center for Barry Square [35]. The senior center was a resolution pushed strongly by the Barry Square group. Mimnaugh remembered that, "politicians were jumping over themselves to support this one!" Residents opened the Barry Square Senior Center in August of 1977 and operates today under the direction of Dolly Hood.

Footprints: Neighborhoods Rule

A Hartford Times editorial from March 10, 1976 on resident input into the Community Development Act funding application process wrote: "The neighborhood groups are only now developing any substantial power or influence over city affairs. For years now they have been relatively silent, relatively uninvolved in the policies being developed and directions being pursued by Hartford's elected officials. . . community involvement can do more for the restoration of Hartford's economic social and political viability than any other single factor. Carbone said if the original budget proposed by the city manger and supported by neighborhood groups had been approved, he was prepared to go to court to block the spending plan because it does not meet the needs of this community: a councilman threatening to sue his own community in order to force his will on the community's residents." [40]

5. 'Citizen's Lobby'

Frustrated with the failure of the Citizen's Assembly and his inability to set the neighborhood agenda, Carbone went back to the drawing board and came up with an organization called the 'Citizen's Lobby'. He attempted to use the group as an army to support efforts he was promoting at the State Capitol. This group lasted only a year, as funders said they could not support something so dependent on Carbone. Eventually, a more independent organization called the 'Citizen Research Education Network' (CREN) was created.

HART successfully fought off these early distractions and reactions to growing neighborhood power. The focus of HART remained on moving crisply forward on common neighborhood issues.

The Middle Years (1981 to 1987)

"HART recognizes that its action plans are a call for change and that change involves conflict and discomfort. The organization accepts controversy as a necessary component of neighborhood improvement."

— 1984 United Way evaluation report [113]

"I don't see HART being around much longer. Once the city starts responding to the resident's problems, things will change."

— An anonymous city official, 1981 [72]

"I don't do business with HART, never have.

Community groups want too much." [139]

— former State Treasurer Francisco L. Borges
as Hartford Deputy Mayor in 1985

During the period from 1981 through 1987, HART neighborhoods boasted a number of neighborhood-level successes, including some important banking investment victories around the newly created 'Community Reinvestment Act' [told in the next section of this narrative]. HART also experienced several major issue losses related to tax breaks for downtown developers. Other key events that mark this time include the loss of organizing veterans Mimnaugh and Lash, who with the advent of United Connecticut Action for Neighborhoods, had less of an everyday role with HART. Also, HART faced two internal challenges: [1] some leaders and staff began testing the elected political office waters, and [2] tensions exploded between HART's Vecinos Unidos and several area block clubs.

Neighborhood's Clashes with Deputy Mayor Robert Ludgin

After major battles with Nick Carbone in the 1970's, a problem grew (and still exists today) where politicians would claim to be 'for the neighborhoods'. But when it came time to deliver, they would seldom follow through when it came time to make policy, financial or other decisions that affected the lives of Hartford communities.

It is hard to imagine today, but there was a time when candidates for office in Hartford did not wave the 'N' word — neighborhood. Former HART organizer Jane Murphy:

"Today I read the paper and I get a laugh, because they quote politicians saying, 'It's important to have community involvement. The residents need to have a voice in that.' Ten years ago no one wanted to hear that. It was: 'We'll make the decisions for you and get out of my office.'" [231]

David McKinley (who took over for Wayne Johnson as the third HART director in the winter of 1980) describes when he became aware that politicians were seeing and using the growing power and influence of HART and other similar groups:

"I think the one way you can measure the impact of HART is by the use of the word 'neighborhood.' It seemed like starting in 1980 or 1981, every time there was a city election, whether it was a City Council, Mayor election or a State Representative election — that the candidates were climbing over themselves to throw out that word "neighborhood". Every year or two there would be slates of candidates, and politicians would all be claiming in their advertisements which ones were really more of the neighborhood slate.

"I think the organizing that went on in Hartford really gave neighborhoods an identity. It was different from political parties and political organizing, or other sorts of institutions that had existed in Hartford for years and years, like the Italian American Clubs and the PTAs, and other organizations that had been around a long time. But I don't think it was until HART started organizing that neighborhood with a capital 'N' became almost an institution. It used to make me laugh to see these candidates for public office use this word "neighborhood" on their campaign material, and think that people are stupid enough to say, 'Oh, he says he's a neighborhood person. We believe it.'" [206]

City Councilman and later Deputy Mayor Robert Ludgin (on Council from 1977-1981) was one who waved the 'N' word, and a central player in the following examples of an elected official working for all interests *but* those of the neighborhoods!

Ludgin Aims to Erase Carbone

"Carbonized" — a person who had worked in the Nick Carbone administration in the post-Carbone era — and with little career prospects under the new Deputy Mayor Robert Ludgin. [197]

— Jim Mason, Director Community Relations
with Cigna insurance company

Robert Ludgin described his administration:

"I was in a council from December '77 to December '81. When I became Deputy Mayor in 1979 I observed that we had a city that was controlled by one person (Nick Carbone) and there was no debate, which is not the way democracy is supposed to work. You should be allowed debate. There should be a lot of controversy, which I think is healthy in a democracy, just as there's supposed to be a lot of competition in the marketplace.

"Well, it gets to be a real impediment to open government when you have a six-three government in a municipality that is very much controlled by one person. Then it really means that government really takes place in the secret caucus hall before the Council meeting. And the Council meeting is a Broadway show that's already had its dress rehearsal."

Commenting on his efforts to erase and undo all traces of Carbone, Ludgin does not deny that he spent time doing just that. Ludgin:

"I would say so. Sure. Undo is one way to put it. I guess I would say my time was spent changing policies. Trying to change direction." [221]

Following Ludgin as Deputy Mayor was Rudy Arnold who observed:

"I think he [Ludgin] put himself on somewhat of a vindictive course of action. He kind of had an agenda to wipe out any vestiges of his predecessor, Mr. Carbone. And that kind of an agenda — for any politician — is not very far-sighted. And eventually it catches up with you. So when Mr. Ludgin went in to get rid of the City Manager there was a lot of stalemate in the city." [199]

Ludgin Aims at HART and the Neighborhoods

In a 1977 essay on Democratic participation and politics, Robert Ludgin, a candidate for City Council, wrote that he looked at 'the growth of organizations such as the West End Civic Association and HART as symptoms of a local Democratic Party that itself is not responsive to the neighborhoods.'

Ludgin:

"I think that whenever anyone is organized and they're making opposition, and especially if they're getting headlines or they're having meetings, making noises — people respond to that. Again, I think it should be that way. That's what open democracy is all about.

"I have some negative feelings about the way HART did things, but it was never negative about the fact that they organized people and they were interested, and they raised issues, and they had an attitude. I think that was fantastic. What I didn't like were more particular things, such as going to HART meetings and being treated rudely. From my part if you asked me four years on the Council, what didn't I like? I'd say rudeness. I loved the competitiveness of it. I loved lots of things about it. But I don't like people coming to Council meetings and being rude to Council members." [221]

Ludgin, who wrote of democracy and people participation and during his campaign pledged that there would be no more tax breaks for downtown developers, quickly became a key lightning rod in neighborhood efforts to stop tax breaks to developers.

Tax Deferral for Developer David Chase and the Hilton Hotel

David McKinley:

"It seemed like every few months we were fighting with the City Council about whether or not the city should give a tax break to an office building that was being proposed for downtown. And we lost most of them.

"But I think history has shown that we were right to fight these tax breaks. First of all, it was a major public policy mistake for the city powers to allow housing downtown to be demolished and make way for office space. And now everybody complains that downtown is a ghost town. Well, it's basically an office park, and the city didn't have the foresight in its public policy to say, 'Yes, we want offices, but we need to

maintain a mixture of housing and other things downtown.' The way I look at it, the city could never say "no" to a developer. Any developer would come in and say, 'We want to put up an office building.' The city didn't have the guts to either say, 'No' or 'Yes, please come, but here are some conditions we're going to place upon you, such as maintaining the housing, providing some money to build housing,' or those type of linkages that the city never really put in place." [206]

In 1980 developer David Chase requested a low-interest federal loan along with substantial tax abatements for a downtown building, the 350 room Hartford Hilton. (Chase had given Deputy Mayor Ludgin, who pushed for the tax break, a \$1000 political contribution to pay off a 1979 primary campaign debt). The planned \$16 million renovation would take place in a downtown that at the time was booming. The Democratically controlled City Council and Deputy Mayor Ludgin said they were trying to rush through this request so the renovation could proceed rapidly and before the end of fellow-Democrat Jimmy Carter's administration. The *Courant* said that there were too many questions about the hotel project to warrant hasty submission of this grant application (Urban Development Action Grant from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development). [6]

At HART's 5th Congress, outgoing president Alta Lash said before a crowd of 300 that "People are tired of the subsidies contributed by tax dollars that are going into things like the Hilton Hotel." She added that, "We are getting the short end of it and we will not stand for it!" [57] Ludgin tried to explain his views on the subsidies. His answers drew only jeers. He finally walked away from the microphone, to a chorus of boos. [87]

The next week, in late October of 1980, the City Council voted 7-2 against a \$2 million application for a federal loan from the Department of Housing and Urban Development for the Hilton. [55] Chase said after the vote "We never felt there would have been any opposition to a grant such as this where everyone stood to benefit." Even Ludgin switched his vote to no at the last minute. This was a major, albeit short-lived, victory for HART. [88]

Despite the Council's vote against the Chase/Hilton development in early November, efforts to fashion a tax break for the project were not yet dead. Far from the public eye, Ludgin and Chase continued working through November and in an unexpected move on December 8, 1980, the City Council approved a new tax deferral plan to help developer David T. Chase renovate the Hilton. [56]

HART leaders were outraged at Ludgin's switch to approve the Chase tax break. During those robust and competitive days of the Hartford real estate market, residents did not believe that it was the role of local government to use public money to provide tax deferrals and subsidies. HART was not alone in this belief. More and more public officials came to agree with the neighborhood position. Councilman Rudy Arnold and later Deputy Mayor described the massive development and tax breaks sweeping through Hartford:

"Why should some other taxpayer, especially owners, be forced to subsidize businesses? That was one of the issues I and the HART people had to agree on. I voted against the Hilton tax deferral. I didn't think it was a good idea. Time has proven me correct. There is no more Hilton. But at the time, they wanted to get a grant for Mr. Chase and the Hilton

building, and I thought it was a bad idea. His promise was, 'Oh, gee, I'll put this Hilton up and renovate it, and it will employ all these people.' And I thought, 'Why should we be subsidizing a developer to do that?' That's not where we want to put our money." [198]

Tax Deferral for Developer Harry Helmsley

On the heels of the Chase defeat in 1981, HART's Jack C. Berian and Roz Strickland led a handful of residents in protesting a \$600,000 tax deferral for two developers, Phoenix Mutual Insurance Company and Harry B. Helmsley of New York City. The residents carried signs with slogans attacking tax breaks for downtown developers at the Phoenix Mutual headquarters in Constitution Plaza, opposite the site of a planned \$70 million twin twelve story office tower complex. The week before the City Council Planning Committee voted 3-2 in favor of the deferral, with Councilmen Rudy Arnold and John O'Connell voting against the measure. Several participants in the protest carried signs declaring their demands: "Stop subsidizing downtown millionaires", "No more monopoly games with our money" and "We need housing, not offices." Berian said Hartford no longer has to offer developers incentives for building downtown. "All the developments can and should stand on their own merits," he said. [26]

Footprints: Roz Strickland

Rosiland (Roz) Strickland, who in 1980 was president of HART, worked with Vecinos Unidos leader Luz Santana at Anderson Laboratories, a factory in Bloomfield. Santana then took a job with HART and after a while Strickland started attending the meetings with her. Strickland said, "I think HART has had a lot to do with the progress that different groups have made, getting used to each other, used to working with each other. Before HART, lots of people were afraid to come back to walk on Park Street. Now I see all kinds of people there every day. We don't try to change each other. We just try to get along, and work on issues that are important to all of us." [71]

"HART is one of those very rare institutions which has never discriminated against women. You move up the ranks according to your interest and ability, not because of traditional hierarchy." (As of 1995, fourteen of HART's first twenty years have been led by women). [68]

In a *New York Times* article, proponents of the Helmsley abatement argued that the proposed office complex would bring in \$5.2 million more taxes over the next seven years than would the parking lot that currently occupies the property. Jack Berian and other leaders of HART said that argument was not valid because other developers were "lined up eight, ten, twelve deep" to compete for the land. They

were particularly angry at council members who, they said, changed their votes after the developer "wined and dined" them. A Helmsley spokesman flippantly conceded that some members had been "lunched". [27]

On March 9, 1981 the full City Council rejected a proposal to give a \$660,000 tax break to Helmsley. This is the first time the council had declined to grant a deferral for a major downtown project. More than 100 people from HART packed the City Council Chambers. Before the session, HART milled around Councilperson Olga Thompson, a key vote. Resident Brigitte Poulin said to her, "If he (Helmsley) needs \$660,000 to make this work, he's got a serious problem." Alta Lash added that "this man owns half of Manhattan". [57]

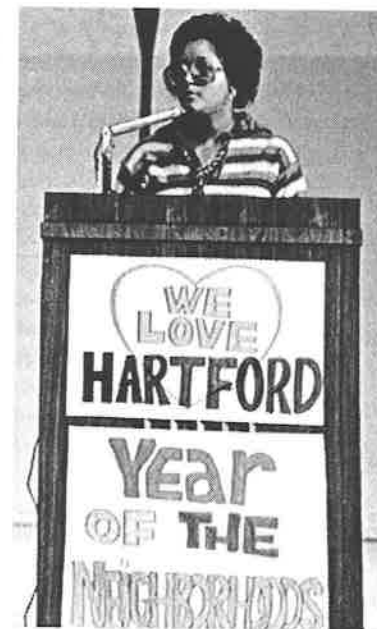
Later that night, after the Council voted to deny the tax break and after

HART leaders left to celebrate, Deputy Mayor Ludgin called for a special meeting of City Council to reconsider its 5-3 vote denying a tax break for Helmsley just hours before. Those five, Arnold, Sidney Gardner, O'Connell, Antoinette Leone, and Olga Thompson said they would stand by their original votes. [28] Ludgin called for this meeting after a spokesman for Helmsley said the developers were re-evaluating the entire project because the tax break had been denied.

Former Organizer Art Feltman:

"When the Council was in to vote on it (the Helmsley tax break), we had really built our momentum, and probably had about a hundred and fifty people. Ludgin knew we were coming down. So he got the Hartford construction unions that were going to benefit from the project because they had been working on the project — Ludgin got them to come and fill half the hall with their people. And it being like eight o'clock on a Monday night, these guys kind of had some time to kill between the time they got done with their jobs and the time they got to the meeting. So they generally had at least three beers between them, for each of them. So by the time they got down there, they were very rowdy. The Behind the Rocks people who are many of them senior citizens — most of them senior citizens — may have had two or three glasses of tea. And it was a real nasty battle in the audience between the Behind the Rocks folks and the construction workers. You know, each of them testified and shouted and yelled.

"The issue was very heated. The Council voted five-three to reject the Helmsley deal, and people from the neighborhood were thrilled. We went to the Arch Street Tavern down the street, to celebrate and went home. We picked up the newspaper the next day, and learned that Ludgin



Roz Strickland makes presentation at 2nd HART Congress in 1977.

had — while we were down at Arch Street or later — gotten reconsideration, and that the Council had reversed itself while we were at home in our beds, thinking that we had won the victory earlier. When the papers called the next morning for the reaction, Mary Cleary, who was at that point in her early eighties and lived on Allendale Road — white hair. Not a speck of gray in it, even. She called Ludgin a “snake in the grass” for what he did, and that was the quote that ran on the front page of the next day’s paper.” [235]

McKinley:

“The Council voted in the neighborhood’s favor, and it’s ten o’clock at night, so everyone went home thinking they had won. After we had left, apparently Bob Ludgin was able to reverse the vote, and it was rumored that Bob Ludgin whispered to a colleague that he’d give a hundred dollars to see Alta’s face tomorrow morning when she read that the vote had actually kept the issue alive.” [206]

The next step was for the full City Council to vote again on the tax break. It was believed that Councilperson Olga Thompson would change her vote to favor the tax break. She had been besieged by lobbyists on both sides. O’Connell and Antoinette Leone later that week said they would also change their vote. “I’m convinced the developer will walk away from the project if he doesn’t get the deferral,” said O’Connell. “We’re aghast at this situation,” HART leader John Berian said at a news conference. “Who are they representing, Helmsley or this community?” [129]. The meeting was held, and the vote was 6-3 in favor of the deferral.

What finally became of the project? Feltman: “What ultimately happened, even though the tax break was granted, Helmsley was ticked that he had to go through this whole aggravation, and decided Hartford wasn’t a good place for him to do business. It wouldn’t be as smooth sailing that he had in New York and other places, and he decided not to go forward with the deal.”

In the fights with the City on tax breaks to developers like Chase and Helmsley, HART’s David McKinley feels that the “significance of these issues went well beyond a city council vote, which was often against us. We sent a strong message that this policy would not continue without a fight from the neighborhood. In the process of sending this message I think eventually we did change city policy, and there’s no doubt that we developed neighborhood leaders.”

Ludgin vs. HART and the United Way

“No doubt though that HART’s neighborhoods are better off because of HART. And I was damned proud when the United Way accepted HART, even at a time when HART was nipping at the ankles of business establishments.”

— Jim Mason, Director of
Community Relations at Cigna

Despite these setbacks, there was a bright spot immediately following the Chase and Helmsley tax breaks. Ludgin got clobbered trying to have the United Way withdraw its funding of HART.

HART leader Donald Romanik:

“Ludgin was a pretty despicable type of person. He just had it in for the organization, and at one point in April 1981, after the Helmsley fight he went to United Way and tried to get them to defund HART because he just felt that why should United Way support HART when HART beats up on public officials.”

Sylvia Levy was on the United Way allocations committee at the time:

“He [Ludgin] did try to get it pulled. I know that we made the decision at the United Way. There was just no question that United Way was not going to buckle under something like this, and about that there was no resistance. I mean there was discussion, but nobody was going to tell the United Way what agencies to fund.”

Footprints: Sylvia Levy

“I was at Covenant Insurance, in 1977 or 1978. Covenant Mutual Insurance Company, which no longer exists was a small, very old insurance company. That’s where I was and I remember because we were in a typically corporate atmosphere and horrified at the idea of these neighborhood people who were doing something like this [picketing the Chamber of Commerce]. It was pretty daring and of course the whole corporate community talked about it.”

“It seems to me that Alta Lash called me shortly after this incident at the Chamber. I called Mo Coleman at the Hartford Process and said, ‘Mo, why ever is she calling me?’ and he said, ‘When you meet her, you’ll love her.’ I said, ‘Okay, if you say so,’ and I did.”

“I think I probably shocked them [contributions committee of the Covenant Mutual board] to no end when I recommended that we fund HART, but I guess that I argued the case successfully at what ever low level it was. It probably wasn’t any more than \$150 at the most, but I can remember getting a lot of questions about it and just digging my heels in and saying, ‘This is really important.’ From there on it was no problem.”

“To this day they are two people [Jack and Alta] I’m extremely fond of and think the world of. I really do.”

Mimnaugh:

“Ludgin was trying to tell United Way not to give any money to HART. The United Way told him to stick it. Ludgin at this time was already losing tremendous credibility. At that point we had people who normally didn’t like us that much. But very high up officials of the insurance industry were on the United Way board, who just thought that that was outrageous that a deputy mayor of the City of Hartford was trying to tell United Way what to do. They just thought it was outrageous. Ludgin took that one on the chin real badly. I have to say, that particular fight was symbolic and after he lost that, he was dead meat. It was clear he was not going to get elected again. Nobody wanted to do business with him.” [204]

After pushing the unpopular Chase and Helmsley tax breaks and attempting to pressure the United Way into removing HART's funding, a groundswell of anger arose against Ludgin. Close to that time Ludgin announced that he was running for another term on City Council. Resident Donald Romanik:

"HART people did everything possible to have him defeated in 1981. We couldn't be active in campaigns, in terms of word of mouth. And HART was very influential at that point. When Ludgin was defeated it was a big victory for HART people." [212]

Mike Allison, HART director from 1982-1986:

"We did all we could short of an electoral campaign to have Ludgin defeated. We did educational work, report cards on neighborhood issues, and the like. He clearly set himself up as someone not willing to take direction from the neighborhoods, and he paid the price for that."

Former Hartford Deputy Mayor Robert Ludgin hears it from three United Way funded groups in a 1981 cartoon.



The next chapter of HART's history begins with major fights over property taxes. The first battle was over a special program called the 'tax classification'. This campaign took place at roughly the same time as the efforts to stop the tax breaks for downtown developers as described above.

Downtown, Neighborhoods and Taxes

A. Tax Classification (1981)

Before a major fight to renew the tax differential in 1982, an effort to create a new property tax program called 'tax classification' was pushed for by HART in 1981.

Fight for Tax Classification

At a January 1980 meeting of more than one hundred residents of the Behind the Rocks Neighborhood Association at St. Lawrence O'Toole Church, State Senate President Joseph Fauliso and State Representatives Richard Lawlor, Mary Ellen Flynn and George Ritter all said they would work to extend the tax differential program during the General Assembly session. Fauliso told the group, "I support your proposal without any doubt, any hesitation, unequivocally." HART leaders were somewhat surprised at the support from the legislators. Agnes Dubin, a widow of more than twenty-three years and owner of a three family home said she pays more for taxes alone on her property each year than she paid on her mortgage and taxes each year when she bought the house on Wilson Street. [86]

HART joined a number of other groups where 500 people attend a Planning and Development Committee public hearing at the General Assembly in April 1980. HART wanted its tax classification bill to replace the current tax assessment differential policy due to expire in July 1981. HART's classification bill defined four classes of property: residential up to three family, apartments with four or more units, industrial, and all other commercial properties. Bill supporters

from New Britain, Bridgeport, Thomaston, and Windsor at the hearing wore paper three-cornered hats bearing the message, "No taxation without classification".

Joseph Crisco, a spokesman for United Technologies (and in 1995 a Connecticut State Senator) said adoption of classification would cause businesses to shop for those towns offering the best tax deal to relocate their business and equipment. Residents rejected this as a hollow claim, saying that property taxes are not that big a bite in the budgets of major corporations. [23] Resident Clare Murphy gave her testimony while wearing her hat adorned with miniature buildings depicting what

Footprints: Joe Langlais

Joe Langlais was a key leader in this tax classification fight. Langlais:

"I was born in Canada and grew up in Waterbury. I went in the Service for four years — the Air Force, from 1955 to 1959. I came back and bummed around a little bit and then got married. Four years in 1968 after our marriage we moved to Hartford, and that's where I've been since. My first rent was on Orange Street. And after that we moved to Newton Street, which is where I live now. And we raised our children.

"HART grew on me because at the time I wanted things to improve around the neighborhood, and I wanted things to improve for the little folks, and that's why I joined HART. It was good. We weren't always successful, but at least we were doing something. That was the secret. We weren't just wringing our hands and saying, 'Woe is me'. We were out there, more or less demanding action."

would happen if classification was not passed: neighborhood houses with unhappy frowns and big commercial buildings with happy grins! [104]

HART hosted a February 1981 'Bread and Water' party at Burns Elementary School for state legislators to discuss the tax classification bill then before the State. This was a protest also against a wine and cheese party the Connecticut Business and Industry Association had recently sponsored for state legislators at the Sheraton Hotel. [24] Three large loaves of white bread and cold water in paper cups were served. "Unlike the CBIA we can't spend thousands of dollars wining and dining our legislators," said Joe Langlais. People wore small white cards stating how much their property taxes eventually would increase if the property tax classification bill did not become law. [126]

At a twenty minute meeting in May 1981, Governor William O'Neill bluntly told the group that he will not support a tax classification bill. HART's Brigitte Poulin termed the governor's attitude "insensitive". [128]

After this long, hardfought campaign, the tax classification bill failed.

Footprints: HART President Not To Be

At the 1981 HART Congress prior to the height of the tax differential fight, resident Donald Romanik threw his hat in the ring to be elected HART President. He had no opposition. Just days before the October Congress, however, Romanik cited a conflict of interest that he said prevented him from taking the position.

Romanik:

"The Courant was trying to do a piece that HART was changing their tactics. They were electing this sort of moderate lawyer to be the President, and it was clear that one of the clear priorities for HART in the next go-around was going to be extending the property tax differential. But I guess at that point I felt that since I was working for the legislature, I could not take too active a role in terms of the lobbying and going down to the Capitol. Anyway, my boss called me to the office and said that this was unacceptable, and that I could be a member of the organization, but I couldn't be President, and therefore I had to withdraw from the Presidency at the Congress. When I was supposed to be elected by acclamation, I had to withdraw and say, 'Due to conflict of interest in my job, I can't be President.' So that caused somewhat of an organizational problem, and also sort of a personal issue because all of a sudden this became very personalized, and my job was at stake, and all this kind of stuff.

"The Congress was on a Sunday. The article hit Wednesday or Thursday of that week. It was to the point where I couldn't even withdraw until the Congress. There wasn't even enough time under the bylaws to nominate somebody else. So at that point, I think, what we decided is Jack Berlan would be the president. Then the media after that said, 'Crisis of leadership'. Here they had this guy running to be the President, and he had to withdraw. Where is the organization going?" [212]

Tax Differential (1982)



Hartford resident pushes for tax fairness.

In the late 1970's HART helped fight to maintain the city's 'tax differential' program, where residential units were assessed at 45% of the real market value while commercial property was assessed at 70%. The state-allowed differential program was scheduled to expire in 1981, when residential property would also be assessed at 70% of their market values.[16] Not long after the renewal of the differential in 1979, the State made it clear that it would not renew the differential in 1982. Despite long odds, HART made an effort to have the differential renewed in 1982.

Leader Vicky Raczka:

"It was a matter of who was going to carry the burden. Homeowners, definitely, were carrying more than their fair share, way more than their fair share. It was very recognizable that if

Hartford's going to be a city, even today, it's got to have homeowners in it. It's got to have people living here."

The business community fought strongly against the bill. And because they were in a boom, these businesses were less subject to pressures from the City Council, who claimed to support the bill. HART Director Mike Allison reported that 'the corporate community did not want to be pushed around again,' as they had three years earlier. [105] Connecticut Bank and Trust President Water Connolly said in private that he didn't care how much pressure he came under from the community groups because his bank had no investments in Hartford. According to files from the time, he was right: the CBT branch at Park Street had \$29 million in deposits in 1980, with just one mortgage and five home improvement loans for Frog Hollow, for a total of \$72,000.

Former City Councilman Allan Taylor:

"When I got elected to the City Council in the fall of '81 — the big issue that the city was facing in the coming legislative session was the renewal of that tax differential legislation. The Chamber of Commerce and Carbone had reached some kind of deal in 1979, and the Chamber ultimately accepted that differential legislation the first time around. They ran an all out campaign against its renewal in 1981. They had a war room, I'm told, I was never allowed to see it, of course. They took out full page ads in the *Courant*. I remember that I put together, with city staff help, a booklet — fifteen or twenty pages of charts and diagrams pointing out the crap they were spreading." [222]

HART organizer and director David McKinley (1979 to 1982) described some of the forces lined up against residents in this fight:

"The CEO of Hartford Insurance Group was calling us up. He called me and said — at the time that I was the HART Director — 'We would like to sit down and talk to you about working out something on this property tax issue.' And so I was all excited. I figured finally they're

giving us a place at the table. That figurative and literal place. I started calling around to the leaders. Guys like Brigitte Poulin and Joe Langlais and Jack Berian. Their response was, 'What do we want to meet with him for? We don't have anything to compromise. This isn't an issue that we're willing to let compromise. We feel we're right and there's no compromise we can give.' Often the organizers get accused of being manipulative or somehow being too strident. My experience was that in a lot of cases it was the organizers saying, 'Hey, let's sit down,' and the leadership is saying, 'There's nothing to work out. We don't have any sacrifices. We're already compromising.'" [206]

At a January 1982 meeting more than 600 people met at Kennelly School to push for renewal of the differential. Vicky Raczka, Jack Berian, Clare Murphy, George Keduk, and Martin Bowman led the meeting. Hartford taxpayers were still paying the highest property tax in the state, because Hartford has less residential property and more tax exempt property than any other city in the State. Downtown was booming, but the city had lost 14% of its 22,000 people over the last ten years, according to an article by Clare Murphy. At this meeting there were no solid commitments from any of the gathered state officials. [105]

The next month HART led a coalition including other Hartford community groups to help with the fight. Groups included the West End Civic, Southwest Seniors, Blue Hills Civic, ONE (Organized Northeasters), La Casa de Puerto Rico, Sigourney Square Civic, Southend Seniors, Southwest Civic, and others. [106] 350 people were at first coalition meeting in February in 1982. The Chamber of Commerce was invited but did not attend.

As the campaign progressed, HART tried to gain other allies to help promote the differential legislation. One was State Senator William DiBella. Former organizer Art Feltman observed:

"Bill DiBella was elected — he was a former Council person — to fill a vacancy at the State Senate. He was out to make a name for himself. And even then, he had a wheeler-dealer attitude about him. So he was a very good person to champion this differential legislation. And as wealthy as he is, and as much of a sharp shrewd businessman that he is, he and the downtown business interest never really got along. And I think the reason for that was that Bill DiBella did — although he became well heeled in his middle years — he came from the wrong side of the tracks, in the way he grew up. His father died when he was young, and I think Bill never really identified with the upper crust white Anglo-Saxon Protestant parish structure that ran downtown, and they felt the same way about him. They felt that he may drive a nice Jaguar and wear expensive suits, but he wasn't one of them either. So it became very much an ego battle between he and them, as to who had more power. And each was determined to prove that they did. So it became a power struggle, not only between the neighborhoods and downtown, but also between DiBella and the larger business interests."

After a number of meetings in the neighborhoods, the tax differential battle moved to the State Capitol to seek support for the bill. Residents learned quickly that the Capitol was a very different arena in which to conduct neighborhood

business. McKinley:

"We'd be hanging around the Capitol at a time that the legislature was making a big vote and we'd be standing around, around the hallways with all the lobbyists, because that's what you do at the Capitol. You spend a lot of time standing around waiting for two minutes to talk to somebody. And all the state senators are filing into — maybe it was the Democratic state senators — their caucus room. And, of course, they wouldn't let us in. But we see the lobbyists and the Chamber of Commerce walk in. It's like, how come they get to have their person there and we can't? How come we don't have a seat at that table? It was very clear to people that — literal and figurative — we wanted a seat at the table. That's really what we were fighting for. Of course, we didn't want to just send someone in for some meeting. We wanted the meeting held with open doors." [206]

And while there was clearly strong opposition to the bill, at times it was not certain who the allies were. Feltman:

"One dynamic that was operating here was that all the neighborhoods and the City were both lobbying for an extension of the differential. But because City Hall didn't want to be responsible for the big tax increase that would hit downtown if the differential passed, they wouldn't meet with us. So City Hall officials would go up to lobby on the same side, and meet with the legislators, and we would go up to meet with the legislators, and the city officials — the Council people, and even the Tax Assessor pretended like we didn't exist."

Resident Joe Langlais:

"At the State Capitol is where I first ran into Mr. DiBella. He was just starting out over there, and we were just starting out. And it's kind of funny because he seemed to try to convince us that he was after the same



HART'S Vicky Raczka addresses the media at an important May 1982 hearing on the tax differential. State Senator William DiBella is standing to Raczka's right.

thing that we were after, but he never wanted to talk to us about it. So that was kind of confusing for us". [laughs] [229]

"Cold Blooded Business Thugs . . ."

In May 1982, the differential campaign reached a critical point. In a very short time residents would either win or lose the fight. Several of those most involved with the issue share their recollection of the vote on the bill at the State House:

Resident Donald Romanik:

"When the differential bill finally came to a vote on the floor, it just was incredible, sitting in the gallery. It was clear that it was going to go down. A lot of these legislators took an opportunity to do a lot of HART bashing, and it was a real depressing night. I just remember we all went over to the Sisson Tavern afterwards to sort of drown our sorrows in pizza and beer. It was just very emotional. People took it very personally." [212]

Leader Vicky Raczka:

"We filled that chamber at the State Capitol. We completely filled it. We were not only the gallery, but since the room was used as public hearing, we were in that whole big room. There was speaker after speaker after speaker. It was really something. There might have been a thousand people there. That was incredible. Every day that we kept at it we were saving people some money, so, it was worth it."

Feltman:

"The key moment came when we got a call from Tim Moynihan, who was then the House Majority Leader, and later became the Director of the Hartford Chamber of Commerce, which is where he remains. But Tim was the House Majority Leader, and was then a pro business conservative Democrat. And he had always been against the neighborhood position, in favor of the downtown position. And so he'd be willing to entertain the differential in terms of passage on the House, if DiBella would amend it in the Senate to weaken it and to water it down. And DiBella came back to the neighborhood and said, 'What do you want me to do? Do you want me to weaken it because Moynihan said he might support it if we did? Or should we just go forward, send it down, and let them do what they want with it in the House, and let them weaken it if they want to?' And we decided — we made a foolish decision — based on bad advice by me — that we would not weaken it. That we would pass it. Because we thought we had the votes to pass it in the Senate the way it was, that DiBella had the votes, and they would take care of it with the House. So it was sent down as is.

"Moynihan took umbrage at that and said, 'Well, DiBella is not willing to play ball with me so screw him and screw the bill.' And we never even made it to the Governor's chair. In the course of that, when the House threw it down, we also saw the fingerprints of Bill O'Neill in the House vote. Because all his supporters — all his buddies in the House — he was a former House member himself before he became Lieu-

tenant Governor — all his buddies in the House voted against us. And we suspected that O'Neill had asked them to do that so that the bill would not come to his desk and he wouldn't have a tough decision to make about whether to sign it and tick off the business community, or to veto it and tick us off. And so he was better off that it never came to his desk, and that's exactly what happened."

The differential bill was defeated in May 1982. The headline in the June *HART Times* newsletter read: "Cold blooded business thugs bludgeon neighborhoods". Former City Councilman Allen Taylor:

"When the legislation wasn't renewed, they apparently handed out t-shirts at a party, celebrating their victory in the war room they had set up at the Chamber of Commerce. It was very bitter." [222]

Footprints: HART Presidency and the Anatomy of a Neighborhood Campaign

Barry Square leader and HART President (1983) Vicky Raczka and Nancy Churchill, HART organizer recall that year's campaign for the HART Presidency:

Churchill:

"When I first started at HART it was August and Vicky had been involved for a long time and was interested in running for President. I had no idea what would be involved. And so we sat down, and we knew she was going to have some stiff competition from Laura Boudreaux in the Center City neighborhood. So we mapped out a strategy. And we literally spent two months — weekends — knocking on doors, going door to door. Even to people who had never heard of HART or didn't want to know of HART — we would knock on doors and introduce them to HART and then introduce them to Vicky and say, 'Please come out to the HART Congress.'" [210]

Vicky Raczka:

"It really took a lot of calling people, asking them if they would call people in their neighborhoods and get them to vote for me. It was true, true campaigning. It was a lot of fun. It really was. We had a lot of contested elections that year. Again, the first time the Board sits down after it's won an election, people are really feeling pretty good about it, because everyone worked hard to get where they got.

"My friends knew that they were probably going to be seeing less of me for that year than ever. My family really didn't know what to make of it. Because it's kind of a unique organization. It's not like you're serving at the Kiwanis or something." [220]

HART Pushes On

Following the defeat of the tax differential bill, HART's Director Mike Allison recalls that HART entered an important period of transition. "HART was into its second five years. During the first five years we were unstoppable, a phenomenon

that caught a lot of people off guard. After we had been around a while, politicians began to accept that HART was a part of doing business in the city. HART became more institutionalized as an organizing entity. The experience then was keeping our momentum, and working to influence the city. During this time we were very active, with a lot of great leaders working on a number of neighborhood level victories, such as slumlord fights, zoning, park improvements, and even a 'pooper scooper' law pushed by Barry Square and Clare Murphy!"

Save the FINAST Grocery Store!

In August 1984 one hundred residents met at Fox Manor to discuss the closing of the 'Finast' grocery store on New Britain Avenue. [113] Nancy Churchill:

"We worked on keeping the Finast in the neighborhood. That was a big issue we worked on with people from Center City. At one point we even went to the Regional Supervisor of Finast, and he lived out in the suburbs in this really big house and had a black Mercedes. We had a demonstration at the Finast because he wasn't giving us any answers on whether or not the Finast was going to move or not. Most of the people involved in that issue were elderly people, and they just all decided at the end of this demonstration, to hop in any vehicles we could find and drive out to his house. So we did." [laughs] [210]

Vicky Raczk:

"Of course, he wasn't at his house. But it was really good that we did that. We left a note and had media there, and we let them know what we did. We eventually were able to sit down, and they stayed and turned out to be a pretty good supermarket." [220]

In 1987 Finast again considered closing its New Britain Avenue store. At that time a 'BJ's Food Warehouse' was being planned for Hartford's North Meadows area. This plan had strong support from CHANE and other neighborhood groups in that area because of the need for more jobs for local residents. At the same time, Finast was then building an 'Edwards' food store on Hartford's Kane Street. The CEO of Finast, a Mr. Samuels, was at the time pushing the 'John Glenn for U.S. President' effort. The State Chair of that effort was State Senator William DiBella. Samuels went to DiBella and said that BJ's can't open because it would hurt the newly built 'Edwards' store on Kane Street. Alta Lash recalled that DiBella went to HART and suggested that if HART did not fight BJ's, we would lose the New Britain Avenue Finast.

Despite a clear self-interest to preserve the New Britain Avenue store, neighborhood people chose to support CHANE's agreement with the construction of BJ's. HART would not be manipulated into taking a divisive position. With help from Councilman Allan Taylor, CHANE and HART pushed to have the Planning, Zoning and Development committee and full council meetings to have zoning for BJ's approved. This was conveniently timed the same week DiBella was out of town at the Democratic National Convention. BJ's eventually opened, Finast stayed on New Britain Avenue, and John Glenn lost.

Vernon Street Bus Garage

In August 1982, forty residents took Congresswoman Barbara Kennelly on a tour of the Vernon Street bus garage. Franklin Hunt, a Broad Street resident who lived just twenty feet from the garage. "In the summer they run those buses all night. We've got to close our windows, even during summer." At the time the aging brick garage held about 250 buses. It was built in 1905 years ago for trolleys, and at the time, there were still trolley tracks in the basement.

In an article by Susan Baker of Vernon Street in November, plans to relocate the garage were stuck at the city, who seemed to want to spend more time on downtown and Riverfront Recapture plans. CRCOG (the Capitol Region Conference of Governments) recommended that the garage, which was a regional service center for Connecticut Transit, be moved because of the hazard it posed to the neighborhood. [108]

In October 1986 Walter Bragdon wrote "How long will construction take? Maybe they are waiting for the imported tile for the bathrooms and the gold plated plumbing? In the meantime, Susan Baker gets sick once a year from the exhaust fumes and I get oil fumes on my contact lenses. If the DOT had anything to do with the founding of America, we'd all still be in log cabins and riding horses!"

In a story for the 'HART Times' newsletter by Walter 'Bus Garage' Bragdon of Center City, he reported frustrations at the length of time it was taking to move that first shovel full of dirt. "I now understand why this project costs \$30 million. There must be 500 people working on just the paperwork." [114]

Finally in January 1988 work began on the new Connecticut Transit bus garage in Hartford's North Meadows. The buses and administrative offices moved to North Meadows in February 1990. After more than eight years, a celebration was finally held with Congresswoman Barbara Kennelly who helped obtain \$33 million in federal money to pay for the new facility. [164]

HART Seniors in Action!

In July 1984, HART staff Nancy Churchill helped convene the first-ever meeting with HART area seniors to discuss and take action on senior health care issues. The next month, a meeting was held with more than 500 seniors from HART, the Asylum Hill neighborhood and the city of New Britain! Within six months a coalition called United Seniors in Action (USA) was formed to take action on senior issues.

Over the year hundreds of HART seniors have participated in USA around some of the most significant senior legislation in the country. This has included the 1985 fight to design and implement ConnPACE, which increased the purchasing power of low income seniors for prescription drugs.

In 1987, USA secured a major victory around Medicare Assignment. This win meant that any doctor or provider must accept the fee that Medicare has for any procedure.

The most recent senior-powered victory came in 1993 with a bill that mandated 'Community Rating', where all seniors pay the same premium for Medicare policies. With big changes taking place to Medicare supplement insurance policies, Blue Cross/Blue Shield, which covered 80% of the market in Connecticut, decided to use attained age premiums which meant that the older a senior gets, the more

she or he has to pay for insurance! This 'granny dumping' policy rose the ire of thousands of seniors from across the state. USA took on the entire insurance industry, the insurance commissioner, and the Governor's office, which vetoed the bill. At a session to override the veto, seniors like HART's Mollie Shelton worked tirelessly to pass the bill — by the exact number of votes needed! (100 in the House, 24 in the Senate).

HART seniors, working with USA, have saved seniors many millions of dollars because of their efforts to make health care as accessible and affordable as possible.

Seniors push for Medicare Assignment bill at 1993 State Capitol rally.



Tenth HART Anniversary

In a 1985 *Courant* article on the tenth HART anniversary, public officials agreed that HART had established a presence in Hartford as strong as the office towers sprouting up on the downtown skyline. "It's a healthy process, even though I was often the target," said Nick Carbone. "More positive has come out of it than negative." [48] "When you say Hartford Areas Rally Together, the first thing that comes to my mind is T-R-O-U-B-L-E," said John Cunnane, a Republican on the Hartford City Council.

HART Director Mike Allison:

"I was very proud to be the steward of HART during its second five years. There are very few organizations that made it to ten years! I believe we took some lumps along the way, but we'd also won some important issues. We came through the Regan 1980's stronger than ever. HART was established, and around to stay."

Some 1985 reflections on HART's ten years of community organizing from some neighborhood people:

John Serra, Barry Square:

"Nothing was ever accomplished by staying home and burying one's head in the sand."

Bud Emanuelson, Center City:

"Get out there and do something for yourself!"

Mary Caruso, Barry Square/South End, HART Board:

"We're very lucky to have an organization like HART."

Ron Cretaro, Center City:

"HART doesn't give up."

Vicky Raczka, Barry Square:

"Other organizations talk and complain about the problems. HART solves them."

Mary Camilleri, involved with HART since 1975, Center City:

"When first approached by the first HART organizer I must confess I was skeptical, reluctant, not easily convinced of the motives and concept of a new element of neighborhood direction. I'd always accepted the governmental bureaucracy as a necessary evil. Before HART, my fullest involvement in the community was reading the paper at election time. I hope HART survives and serves and celebrates the 20th anniversary in 1995!"

HART celebrates ten years of organizing Hartford residents at the 1985 Congress.



'Linkage': Downtown and the Neighborhoods Fight Over the Pie

In 1985 and 1986, HART led an unsuccessful effort to link downtown development profits to neighborhoods that were cut off from the trickle-down of improvements. HART Director Mike Allison:

"This was the first time a genuine city-wide came together on an issue. The leadership really worked as a team. This was evidence that politicians could not split the city between racial lines, north Hartford vs. south Hartford."

Linkage was a policy of sharing the benefits of downtown development with the neighborhoods. The neighborhood wanted to adopt a policy that would require developers to pay a fee of \$2.50 on every square foot of new development. [22] But with downtown development at the time, corporations, banks and the developers pocketed all of the profits. The Golden Rule, according to a HART newsletter from the time, prevailed: 'Whoever holds the gold makes the rules'. [111]

Early in 1986 two dozen residents protested inside the Greater Hartford Chamber of Commerce offices over the Chamber's opposition to linkage. The protesters offered to buy back the City Council, saying it had been intimidated by the financial clout of the business community. Some council members said the business community threatened to slow development and reduce its multimillion dollar contributions to community programs if a linkage policy sought by HART, the Asylum Hill Organizing Project, and others was adopted. Joseph Ierna, the Chamber's senior vice president, left the office as the protesters waited in the second floor reception area. He declined to talk about the subject, but later returned and offered to try to arrange an appointment with Herbert Hansen, the Chamber's president.

On June 10, 1986, 150 people crowded the City Council chambers to encourage support of a linkage policy. HART President Ron Cretaro and Marie Kirkley-Bey of AHOP ended the hearing by staging a skit in which they played doctors examining the body politic.

Dressed in white smocks, they described a progressively debilitating disease that had come over the council. The symptoms include a tendency to forget political promises and a 'possibly fatal orthopedic malady'.

"We thoroughly searched the spine area for what is usually bone," said Cretaro, pointing to a full-scale model of a skeleton. "But, alas, it seemed to be missing."

Most council members were not amused. [134]

Allison described other efforts to promote the Linkage effort:

"At one point in early spring we shut down an exit to Interstate 84, near Aetna. We had several cars and about fifty people block the way, choking up traffic for miles until the police finally came."

Former City Councilman Allan Taylor said that Linkage was not successful "because of the Chamber's and real estate developer's opposition. There was enough question about legality to make most people slow down and worry about it." [222] And unfortunately for this fight, the downtown boom had already crested making a link to shrinking profits less winnable. Allison:

"In the end we did lose this vote, but Linkage did establish that develop-

ment could not be separate from neighborhood benefits. There was a clear change in consciousness regarding business development."

In the months following the Linkage defeat some outraged community and labor leaders felt increasingly betrayed by corporate leaders who had waffled on their earlier support of Linkage. This sentiment led to the beginning stages of an alternative political party called "People for a Change." The following describes this in more detail, as well as other key challenges to HART in the middle to late 1980's: [1] HART leaders testing the waters of political office, and [2] turmoil with the group Vecinos Unidos.

Politics and Neighborhood People Don't Mix

HART Constitution: Say 'no' to politics

In 1976 there was a 'big and deliberate' discussion within HART on the role of political involvement at HART, says Jack Mimnaugh. Some, like residents John O'Connell and Bob Davis, wanted HART to be politically involved at the start. Mimnaugh remembers people asking, 'What if Barbara Kennelly (who was a very popular city councilperson then) wants to join HART'? The decision then and still upheld today is included in HART's constitution and says that "no group whose sole purpose is to support or run candidates for political office can become a member group of HART. No incumbent, or candidate for elected political office or political town committee member can be or become a member of HART."

Early HART leader Guy Long:

"I (along with Betty Cummings of Allen Place and others) had put in the HART Constitution that we would not endorse any candidate. I feel proud of that. That was my input to it, because I could see the politicians were coming around, and there was a possibility there that they were trying to sway everybody. We should not get involved in the politics. There have been a lot of temptations, and a lot of people have said, "Boy, you guys have a lot of power. You could elect who you want." But that's not what this is all about. HART can bring out the issues that these politicians have done wrong and let you make your own decisions, which is the right way of doing it." [202]

Leaders Test the Political Waters

Pressure on the most active and effective community leaders to run for political office was everpresent. McKinley:

"I think that from time to time, neighborhood leaders would pop up, who, I think, had political ambition. You get some people who see involvement in HART as a way to get some exposure and perhaps get themselves on City Council someday. But people know — people learn very quickly who they can trust and who they can't. Who is with them and who is not with them. One of the reasons I had so much respect for Alta Lash, who was the President when I first started there, is that she could sit down with the powers that be any time, any place, and not in one way be affected by that — would not let herself be bought off by them.

"If you're a neighborhood leader, it was an amazing thing to watch a guy who is a machinist at Pratt & Whitney. And that's his identity, as well. That's where he works. He's got a wife and family, and maybe involved with some things in his neighborhood. Well, he gets involved with organizing, and suddenly he's on the six o'clock and eleven o'clock news. When he goes into Pratt & Whitney the next day, he's not the same old guy who was there the day before. Suddenly his co-workers would say, 'Hey, Joe. I saw you on the news last night.' I mean, he's got this new identity, as a neighborhood leader or a neighborhood activist. And the way people's lives would really be transformed in some way by becoming leaders and becoming visible. Most of it was very helpful, but I think from the organizer's point of view, we had to be very sensitive to how people's whole identity was changing a little bit. And a lot of the political powers would say — 'Oh, Joe. Why don't you come down and we'll have lunch down at Carbone's restaurant and we'll talk about this problem.' It was difficult for people to deal with that without really being bought off by it. Really stay true to what the neighborhood wanted." [206]

On occasion HART leaders with the best of intentions joined politics believing that this 'next level' would bring greater and faster neighborhood improvements. Would working from the inside be more effective than fighting from the outside? Flora Long and Clare Murphy were two who tried, influenced in large measure by former HART staff Art Feltman who himself had joined the Democratic Town Committee. [McKinley, who had hired Feltman as an organizer in 1980: "Art from the earliest days had political inklings, and was never very good about separating the pure community organizing from those political aspirations."]. [206]

Long:

"I thought that the next level [politics] would be where I could be in on the decision making. That's what I was told when I first was introduced to the idea of joining the (Democratic) town committee. They said that I would know what was happening before a lot of other people, and that I would be able to make decisions that would influence all of Hartford.

"After I was elected, I can't tell you what a disappointment it was. I am inclined to think that my good name, and that of Clare Murphy and others were used in order to break the backs of [former City Councilman Tom] McBride and his gang. The reason for that was because we stood for something, and I don't mean to be conceited because that's not the intent. I fought for a better neighborhood not only for me, but for other people if it would help. On the Town Committee, I felt that I had been used. And once I had that feeling, I couldn't function because I felt that there were too many egos involved. Nothing was being done. It was all about jockeying for power.

"I've come to the point where I think the Democratic Town Committee should be dissolved. There are only a few having the real power, and people like me were not able to get into that circle. I would like to see that whole charade dissolved. With the energy put into the Town Committee, I felt that I had somehow neglected my community. It also made me realize how good HART was. I had a bigger appreciation of HART." [202]

Clare Murphy:

"I had worked in HART for at least ten years. I joined the Town Committee because after being with HART for that time, I thought that there must be an easier way to find out why our issues weren't being addressed by our city officials. And my eyes have been opened since 1990 on this. We find that the system — our city — is run by political cronies, and it's very, very hard to make anything happen. Even I have a struggle with it, but at least I know that I have political access." [236]

Mike Allison described the political environment of the 1980's:

"The 1980's were very different than the 1970's. The hopefulness of the 1970's was replaced with the darkness of the Reagan administration falling across the country. In the 1970's, community organizations like HART were springing up by the hundreds. But in the 1980's, the dominant rhetoric was of 'trickle down' economic benefits and forcing people to pull themselves up by the bootstraps, theories we knew did nothing for our neighborhoods. People in Hartford began saying, why don't we begin taking over some of these political seats to change this awful situation? Even some within HART felt that way, like Ron Cretaro and Art Feltman. These discussions weren't just within HART; they were happening all over the city and in many other parts of the country. But even when the Town Committees tried talking with us not only about issues but about supporting a particular slate, we were very hands off. HART would not be involved in supporting a candidate or party."

People for a Change

In mid-1987 former HART president Ron Cretaro left HART and became chairman of the new political action committee in Hartford called 'People for a Change'. This party was born from an effort by the Hartford Teacher's Union, the Connecticut Citizens Action Group, and others trying to have more political influence in Hartford. People for Change announced three city council candidates: Marie Kirkley-Bey, Bill Hagan, and Eugenio Caro. HART's response: "If we get too politically involved we lose a lot of things within the neighborhood... people liked the fact we're not involved in politics," said HART's Jackie Fongemie. Even Kirkley-Bey said, "I don't believe you can be good in both arenas. To be pure in what you do, you have to be pure in one or the other." Despite this pronouncement, People for Change tried heavily to recruit HART and other neighborhood leaders. [139, 140]

PFC became identified as a progressive, liberal wing of the Democratic party. In 1988 PFC was partially successful when it won two city council seats that were traditionally held by the Republicans. While they gained little influence in their first few years, that was to change with a new Mayor Carrie Saxon Perry, who in 1988 replaced Mayor Thirman Milner when he became a State Senator. Perry was a progressive state legislator with significant ties to progressive legislative activists. Soon she found herself allied with PFC councilmembers and in 1992 successfully ran a slate of six democratic city council members in tandem with three PFC candidates. It was clear that a political revolution had occurred in Hartford, and that a more progressive agenda would be put forth. More on the impact of the Perry years will be included later in this narrative.

End of Vecinos Unidos: the 'Our Lady of Fatima' Fight

During the time of the above political dynamics, HART was challenged by the dramatic ending to Vecinos Unidos, a HART 'umbrella' group that organized the Hispanic community. Since 1976 the work of Vecinos Unidos led to numerous neighborhood victories, including employment, policing, taxes, utilities, rodent control, housing, the Park Street Festival, and others. Some of these efforts were accomplished in coalition with other HART groups. Towards the end of the 1980's, however, tensions between Vecinos Unidos and other HART groups bubbled to the surface and boiled over.

Mike Allison:

"Tension between HART and Vecinos Unidos was there from the day I arrived to the day I left (1980 to 1986). This relationship worked for a while, but the tension between race and class lines was everpresent. We tried different things to manage and bridge the gap. For a while in Frog Hollow we tried to have two organizers, one Latino the other white, but this patchwork didn't work. We had no success in incorporating Latino residents as leaders of blockclubs or in other neighborhoods. Many of us always recognized that this arrangement was not the ideal scenario. Around 1985, there was a movement within Vecinos Unidos along with staff Luz Santana, Ramonita Ortiz and others to create a new Puerto Rican organization, separately incorporated from HART. There were, at the same time, efforts to push for Puerto Rican statehood which helped fuel some of these independence fires. The 'Our Lady of Fatima' fight is where this all boiled over. It was a very painful experience for me."

In 1985 an office and condominium project was proposed at the Our Lady of Fatima church property in Frog Hollow on the corner of Babcock and Russ Streets. This development was supported by blockclubs from those two streets. The project would have changed the small brick church into office space, and the rest of the site into twenty-three two-bedroom condos. The growing congregation of the tiny church was leaving because many of its Portuguese members had left for the suburbs and the Parkville neighborhood where the congregation had begun new construction on a new church.

Vecinos Unidos filed a lawsuit in November 1985 in an attempt to block the sale of the Our Lady of Fatima Church and the development of a condo and office project. Fr. Jose da Silva: "I don't see any reason why they (Vecinos Unidos) are doing this. They are hurting the church now." Esperanza Gonzalez, the woman who filed the suit, argued that a variance granted to the developers by the Zoning Board of Appeals had adversely affected her. She said the variance would allow the neighborhood to become gentrified and lead to an increase in apartment rents. The suit was dismissed by a Superior Court Judge in April, but pitted Vecinos Unidos against other HART leaders.

Allison:

"I really felt in the middle. Here were two HART groups doing what they do best: advancing their own agendas, bringing out people. We went through incredible efforts to help craft an agreeable deal between the two groups. We even brought in Bishop Peter Rosazza to a meeting with both sides. We got to the point where we had an agreement on a deal that included a mixture of unit sizes and preferences for local residents to work

on the project and eventually live there. Bishop Rosazza said that he would work with Vecinos Unidos to make sure these commitments were upheld.

"At the same time we worked with Allan Taylor to have the City Council pass what was really a symbolic resolution supporting the neighborhood residents. After it passed, Taylor essentially sunk our fragile deal by telling a reporter that the resolution had very little meaning. After that appeared in the paper, Luz Santana and others could not trust us."

A deep schism developed between Vecinos Unidos and the nearby Babcock Street block club. Babcock Street residents, supportive of the project, were mad at HART for pushing the lawsuit. Fifty-two Babcock Street residents signed a letter to the newspaper accusing HART of 'not knowing which roots were its grass roots'. [132] At the same time, Vecinos Unidos claimed that HART has not provided the same level of support to them as other member groups. [130] The project never went through, and eventually lead to the dissolution of Vecinos Unidos.

Allison:

"Unfortunately, this wasn't just a neat explosion and then Vecinos Unidos ended. It lasted clear through the fall, several months after I left. If we could have worked out the Our Lady of Fatima deal, Vecinos Unidos probably would have continued, and the tensions would have certainly remained."

After Allison left in the summer of 1986, Nancy Aardema was hired as the new HART director. Aardema had been the director at 'Richmond United Neighbors' in Virginia before coming to HART. "I wanted to move to New England", Aardema recalls. "I was somewhat isolated from other groups in Virginia, and was very interested in working with Jack and Alta."

Aardema:

"HART needed a boost. There were very few Latinos left in the organization by the time I arrived. It was clear we needed to figure out how to bring the populations together. We found the rules were not the same for both Vecinos Unidos and other groups. We hired some Latino staff. The organization really came back together, and began to focus on the issues (common to all people). HART has only gotten stronger over the years."

Jackie Fongemie, HART Board member at the time:

"I became active on the board and it was a stifling board, with some very old-fashioned folks with closed minds and very prejudiced. It wasn't supposed to be like that. That was a mess and it was uncomfortable, but we worked very hard to change all that, to change the reputation that HART had and to get away from that prejudiced stuff."

Organizer Jane Murphy:

"Nancy came into a really difficult time in the history of the organization. She ended up having to try and rebuild a lot of it. She had to do some things that I would say were unpleasant. Shake up the whole organization. It was difficult. She came in for two years, did her thing."

Michael Menation (former HART organizer, hired by Allison):

"It was 1986 — February — and Mike Allison was on his way out. You had Vecinos Unidos fighting with HART and vice versa. You had folks on Babcock Street pissed off at HART. You had the church pissed off at HART. So when I came here, 'HART' was a bad word. It actually was a four letter word. And at the lowest point — by that spring — we had no director. There was Jane Murphy, David Abdow and me. There were the three of us. If we didn't come in to work, there would be no organization. If we weren't there twelve to fifteen hours a day, the organization wasn't going to survive. And if the organization didn't survive, then organizing didn't survive. If organizing didn't survive, the neighborhood would be lost. That's how real it was.

"I would say that was kind of the twilight of HART. Either it was going to go under or it was going to find its way back. Because if you went down the street and knocked on people's doors and said you were from HART — now it's a pretty good thing. Then it was like, 'Oh, those crazy nuts. Oh, yeah. We know about them.' It was a tough time." [207]

Rebuilding of HART

Following the Our Lady of Fatima fight and former HART president Ron Cretaro's move to electoral politics, *Hartford Courant* columnist Tom Condon wrote a piece in March 1988 that began by suggesting that HART's day may be over. But Condon's story, like HART, rallied:

"HART is still at bat and swinging harder than ever. After the Lady of Fatima experience, Nancy Aardema and Jackie Fongemie and others decided to organize around common issues rather than ethnicity. "It's worked out terrifically," said Fongemie. HART also got some assistance from the ten-year property tax revaluation that is under way. "But HART will be around after the revaluation battles", Condon continued, "and that's as it should be." [141]

The Later Years (1987-1995)

Much of the 1980's found HART groups and strategies challenged by an insulated, well-entrenched power structure run by conservative Democrats. The City Manager Al Gatta ran the city through his relationship to the Democratic Town Committee and six Hartford City Councilmembers. The Democratic Town Committee Chairperson Jim Crowley, as with Carbone in the 1970's, often singlehandedly engineered the slate of six Democrats running for council as well as for Mayor. And Gatta's choice for Corporation Counsel, Richard Goldstein, further secured their power base as Goldstein became a rubber stamp for decisions made by the Mayor, Council and City Manager.

It was clear that downtown developers and corporate sector lobbyists had inside access to the power brokers that neighborhood residents had to mount significant campaigns to gain the same access. To move issues forward HART had numerous conflicts with Gatta, Goldstein, and Crowley, such as the 'Gatta's gotta go' property tax fight and a picket in front of Crowley's house in the normally placid South West neighborhood.

During Mayor Carrie Saxon Perry's regime beginning in 1988 HART brought a number of community issues were to the Council for resolution. Early on these saw speedy action. As time went on, however, the trend turned to bureaucratic inaction and mismanagement. Community issues and strategies took the back seat to preferences for 'giveaways' to city unions, most notably the police and school unions. There were also questionable contracts for friends of City Council members and 'platinum handshakes' for retiring city employees. The city manager's office and other departments saw a great deal of change and instability. The corporate sector, already in a depression over a sour economy, found little assistance from city leadership who thought that downtown and the devil were one and the same.

Deep in HART: South West and South End Neighborhood Issues

The South End and South West neighborhoods of Hartford developed as a 'street car' suburb in the late 1800's. This was a time when workers and business executives employed in Hartford's downtown commuted to and from their new single family home by way of a street car. Before then, the area was primarily farmland. The flooding of the Connecticut River in 1936 and 1955, as well as demolition of downtown neighborhoods in the 1950's, dispersed residents of the old East Side to relocate in the South End and South West.

Commercial and Multi-Unit Trash Pick-up

The summer of 1988 was a hot one. Business owners from Franklin Avenue and Park Street put pressure on the City Council to restore trash pickups for small business and large apartment buildings. "What are we supposed to do, sit back and

let them do what they want to do?" asked Mary Caruso a resident of Cowles Street. "We're gonna fight." Some business owners said they would leave their trash out anyway or bring it to city hall. [142]

Boucher:

"The city tried to make merchants and apartment building dwellers pay for their own trash pick-up, which would cost an average owner twelve or fifteen hundred dollars a year. After the City Council passed it, they rejected the people's demands to restore that service three or four times at City Council meetings. I think what was neat about this issues is that sometimes people say, 'Well, HART is mainly interested in residential homeowner based issues. They're not so interested in commercial or apartment owners.' This effort probably saved over a thousand bucks for homeowners and property building owners and commercial folks." [214]

"It was not a highly glamorous issue — trash collection. We were approached by a number of merchants and apartment building owners and said, 'Can you do something with us?' City Hall totally had their mind made up they were going to do this. They gave people three weeks notice that their trash collection would be stopped. They based their idea on other towns around the country were beginning to do this. And so that was going to leave the merchant and apartment building owners, who already had trouble getting their trash picked up. Hartford's an old city. It doesn't have alleys. It doesn't have any place to put trash. So the dumpsters that people would have to put in — where were they going to put them? Do you think City Hall had thought about that? And who was going to be the private trash hauling company or companies? There were a bunch of trash haulers that were going to do it. Some of them who had just been recently indicted for conspiracy and racketeering. So isn't this great city wisdom? You know, here the apartment owners and the businesses are already having to pay an increased tax bill. The economic vitality of the city is at stake, and then they're going to take a basic service away like that? So they took the service out. The first thing we tried to do was to do a little boycott. I'd say less than ten percent of the people participated in the boycott. But it made enough of an impression. So what ended up happening is you had a number of places that the smell was becoming a problem.

"We went to City Hall right after that. We asked them to re-establish trash pick-up. And the City Council voted six-to-three not to re-establish it. And people lost. They were like, 'Oh, geez, what are we going to do?' And then we decided to do a survey of how much it was costing each business to do this. Who their trash haulers were. We collected three hundred surveys back from businesses, mostly. Some apartment building owners. We're finding out the average monthly expense was a hundred twenty-five dollars per business. We found a lot of them were fuming. And we then went back to City Hall. This time we did a little more — we used a more shocking tactic, even though it wasn't a real shocking tactic. We had everybody bring garbage bags. During the Council meeting we testified and then people were waving their trash bags around, just creating harassment. The city again voted six-to-three, but there was much more discussion among them. The sweat factor was

much more noticeable. They weren't just being cold about it. They were beginning to feel real anxious about it. But we lost again six-to-three, and people said, 'Oh, geez, we lost again.' People are getting cynical, skeptical. Are they going to continue to do this?

"Well, the six-to-three vote was the six people — the Democrats voted against restoring it, and the three "People for Change" voted for restoring it. Unfortunately the HART support is with the minority of three councilpeople and not the majority of six. So how do we build allies on this that are going to make these six feel real antsy about this come election time? Because the minority is going to be obviously pushing this issue as we were for the merchant and apartment owners. And some of the Council folk were getting a little antsy about that because of their Town Committee people were beginning to ask, 'What was going on here?'

"Next we invited as many Town Committee people as possible to a meeting — Republican, People for Change, and the Democrats. We were really going to show the facts and what was going on, and really try to create more of a political debate. The thing that made the whole thing turn, was we were able to get the Attorney General's office to come to the next meeting. They were being very mum prior to that, on revealing a lot of the information about the trash haulers because it was under investigation. But we said, 'Okay, even if you can't talk a lot, you can just be there and say you're doing an investigation on these six trash haulers. That's all you have to say.' We had to push the buttons to get the right people to state, 'Okay, this person can go.'

"The meeting included merchants, apartment building folks, plus other residents who were getting tired of all the smell and the filth, and so forth, and Town Committee members. It was down at St. Luke's Church. The place was packed. The Attorney General person did his thing, and said that all these were under indictment, and why was the city forcing the private sector to subsidize the illegal trash haulers?

"Based on this we talked with a couple of other Democrats who would now like to change their vote. But they'd like to change it based on new information to save face so that they can say, 'Well, based on some new information that just came out, now we know that this is a bad thing. We didn't know this prior to this, but there's been this new revelation,' which is bullshit. They had known about this. This was a year-long investigation. But if we could help them save face, then they were willing to change. And we also knew with the added anxiety of having a number of Town Committee folks sitting there, watching them, that this was going to be explosive.

"Three days later, the City Council had a press conference, which none of the people were invited to that were from HART, who had organized this campaign. Just a surprise press conference. It was really funny. All six Democrats decided to change their vote and become leaders of the investigation. A few of us ran down there to attend it and laugh at the whole thing. It was four months before their election. They turned it over".

In September the City Council gave in to public sentiment and voted unanimously to rescind its decision to end trash collection for business and apartment

buildings. Democrats, who controlled the council, said they were surprised at the intensity of opposition. "It's a total victory, because it's exactly what we wanted," said Geno Avenoso, owner of a jewelry store. Resident John McKenna said the resumption of collections will protect business and apartment residents from the higher costs of private trash collection and will keep the city cleaner. [143]

Boucher:

"This was an example of what's a good issue, and how to build an organization. The things I think were more enjoyable out of that were people from Park Street, Franklin Avenue, New Britain Avenue, Maple Avenue, Albany Avenue, North Main Street — all collectively got together. We really worked all that. When they did vote nine-to-zero, which was like a week after the press conference, we made sure we got as many folks down there as possible so they could celebrate and have a victory. And seeing people from Park Street hugging people from Franklin Avenue and hugging people from Albany Avenue. Do you see that everyday? Through the issue it happens. And that was what was so neat. And it doesn't matter whether it was as non-glamorous an issue as trash pick-up." [214]

Footprints: Jim Boucher

Jim Boucher became the sixth executive director of HART in 1988. Previously he had been a VISTA volunteer in Toledo, Ohio in 1979. VISTA was a U.S. government program that provides volunteers to organizations working to improve the living conditions of people in impoverished parts of the country. In 1981 Boucher became a community organizer for Michigan Avenue Community Organization (MACO) in Detroit and served as executive director there from 1986 to March 1987.

Boucher:

"I think the history of HART is: here you have neighborhoods that are having definite struggles, that are impoverished, that have been left outside the power structure for so many years, right in the midst of the State Capitol. Major state decisions are being made within blocks of neighborhoods that have some of the lowest — I should say highest poverty ratings in the country. And then also looking at the great wealth that's around, in terms of both the insurance industry and defense industry, and the great wealth of the suburbs. That contrast of folks having power and having money, and then the folks in the community having little access to power and money is an awesome dichotomy." [214]

South End Development

Zoning

In the 1980's Hartford saw rapid growth and development, much of it encroaching upon neighborhoods and resulting in problems with traffic, parking, congestion and increased density. Small battles between neighbors and developers were fought throughout the city, some successful others not. In the late 1980's HART's Barry

Square and South End groups escalated their battle with developers by suggesting numerous zoning changes on Maple Avenue, Franklin Avenue, Adelaide Street, Bushnell Street, Barker Street and others.

At a May 1989 meeting regarding a multi-unit development planned for Barker Street, resident Clare Murphy confronted Deputy Mayor Al Marotta with questions related to a planned project for that street. Marotta denied that such a plan existed. Murphy then held up a blueprint for the project filed with the Metropolitan District Commission by Marotta's survey company. Marotta was caught in a lie in front of more than one hundred people at the St. Augustine's Church meeting. When the other council members there were pressed for a moratorium on further development, Councilman I. Charles Matthews of Blue Hills ran with the idea. In a news article of the time Matthews said that "I broke the unwritten rule which says that South End politicians deal with South End problems and North End politicians deal with North End problems. I can't stand by and watch Al do nothing." [155]

In June the resolution for a 120 day building moratorium passed the Planning, Development and Zoning Committee. "I feel very good. We weren't looking to stop development, but to prevent unsuitable construction," said Clare Murphy. Matthews said the moratorium is needed to give city officials time to amend zoning and other regulations to prevent a flood of new development before the changes are enacted. Proposed regulations relate to five areas: building heights, building density, parking site suitability, and design review. [156]

In July 1989 at a hot summer night's council meeting forty South End residents watched patiently as the city council worked out a method for introducing the sixty-eight zoning ordinances that are part of HART's moratorium package. Fans whirled in the heat, spectators flapped agendas in front of their faces, and finally around ten p.m. the council voted. "We're very happy," said resident Dulcie Giadone. "Clare Murphy started all of this and we're just glad to see it finally go through." "There are avenues for obtaining waivers," said Matthews. "But hopefully the days of going to bed at night on Tuesday and waking up Wednesday morning with a twenty-five story building in your back yard are gone." The crowd applauded Matthews. [157]

920 Maple Avenue

In September developer Martin Hennessey proposed a ninety-seven unit building at 920 Maple Avenue. He submitted plans for the project three days before the city council passed the above moratorium and began revamping zoning ordinances in the area. Although building plans submitted prior to the moratorium were supposed to be exempt from the new zoning changes, any such building application had to be absolutely complete to be accepted.

Hennessey had some doubts about whether his plans were complete or not, because he contacted councilman Tom McBride, a fellow Democrat and South End, and asked him to clear up the matter. After meeting with Marotta, Richard Cosgrove from the Corporation Counsel's office and Clarence Phillips, Director of the city's License and Inspection Department, Cosgrove issued a legal opinion that Hennessey's project would not have to comply with the new zoning ordinances. Sandra Rivera lived on Dalton Street and said, "My husband and I are very concerned about this because of the size, height, traffic and parking. This area is not a very big street and during the summer there's already a lot of traffic with Goodwin Park nearby.

Development can be a good idea, but they should be limited as to what they're going to put there." [158]

Shortly after that, thirty residents, along with State Representative John Fonfara, held a protest in front of Hennessey's office. "I'm totally against the project," said George Hernandez of 308 Brown Street, just around the corner from the site of the proposed building. Some of the chants: "Hey, hey we say no, Hennessey has got to go!", and "Hennessey, Hennessey, send him back to Glastonbury!". Earlier in the day residents filed an appeal with the Zoning Board, saying Hennessey didn't file a complete building application before June 26, when the city imposed a moratorium and changed its building regulations.



South End neighbors protest development at 920 Maple Avenue in the summer of 1989.

Residents continued meeting throughout the summer. Hennessey was quoted in a local news article that in September 1989 he had attempted to enter a neighborhood meeting which was set up to discuss the proposed building. "I brought my architect and my plans so I could show the residents what the plans looked like. Instead I was physically restrained from entering the meeting," he said. [159]

In October, the zoning board of appeals voted that the ninety-seven unit apartment building should not be built. More than forty speakers testified at the hearing. "That was a record for the board," said chief zoning enforcement officer Abraham Ford. "I've never seen so many people testify." The vote was met with a loud roar and applause in the function room at city hall, which was packed with about one hundred residents during the hearing. [160, 161]

'Friends of Goodwin Park'

After successfully winning the 920 Maple Avenue battle, people from that area looked for another issue. Residents close to Goodwin Park were concerned about the problems that were occurring at the park and the surrounding area and decided to get together to do something about them. Ted Sposito, Danielle Cappa, Linda Kinsella, Paulette Griffen, and HART staff person Fernanda Barreiros were among the originators of the group starting in August 1991. Since then they have successfully petitioned for a South End Community Service Officer in January of 1992,

and in the summer of 1995 celebrated a hard-fought \$1 million state grant to renovate the park's crumbling swimming pool!

Friends of Goodwin Park has also become well known for several special events held during different seasons, including the 'Fall Festival', the 'Summer Festival', and the 'Easter Egg Hunt'. Each of these events draws more than 500 Hartford residents!

Fire Stations

The South West neighborhood was developed recently in history compared to the remainder of the city. South West began its transformation from farmland to a suburban style residential area near the turn of the century, when trolley lines were established. The neighborhood experienced housing booms following both World Wars. Today, South West is a low density residential neighborhood.

An ever-present issue in South West has been the fate of that community's firehouses. Sal Bramante of Freeman Street said, "We think, based on the taxes that we're paying, we don't have much service given to this part of town." Bill Cieri said residents are most concerned about front-line fire services. "Our main concern is for the safety of our neighborhood."

At the 1982 HART Congress, Fire Chief John Stewart assured residents that he intended to maintain and improve current firehouses. "There are no plans to close any South End fire houses in the next three to five years," he said. He said the department has plans to build a new fire house at Hyland Park. [108] On October 26, 1982, the Avery Heights Nursing Home Community sent more than 300 petitions to the City Manager Woodrow Gaitor asking that Engine Company #9 at 655 New Britain Avenue not be closed. An engine company puts out the fire, and consists of four men and a pumper truck that carries fire hoses and 500 gallons of water. [224] The engine company was preserved.

Eight years later on May 27, 1990, Chief Stewart closed Engine Company #9 on New Britain Avenue. After meeting with HART in late June, Stewart decided to reopen that engine company and close another, engine company #15 at 8 Fairfield Avenue. [169]

Two months later on July 24, one hundred people packed Memorial Baptist Church to protest closing of Engine Company #15 on the corner of New Britain and Fairfield Avenues. Several hundred signed petitions were presented to members of the City Council. Residents led by former Councilman John O'Connell and Sal Bramante demanded that all city fire engine companies be made fully operational within one week by reallocating resources from non-frontline duties. Neither Chief Stewart nor Deputy Mayor I. Charles Matthews offered any support for the resolution. [170]

In October, 1990, Engine Company #15 was reactivated as "city expenses were lower than expected for the year". Six months later on June 30, 1991, Engine Company #15 closed again despite that over the previous four years calls for service to #15 increased by thirty-two percent. After several community meetings it was once again reopened in August 16.

In 1994, after five years of planning, the City created a plan that would merge the two fire stations #9 and #15 and their apparatus into one single story, four bay, 17,000 square foot 'super station', located on New Britain Avenue between Santilli's Market and the law offices of Charles Shimkus. The City said it needed a new building to hold a ladder truck, which carries a variety of ladders fifty feet or more.

The pumper, which puts out the fire, has twenty-four foot ladders. The \$4.5 million plan, including money to purchase the building site owned by Charles Shimkus, was to be voted on at a referendum on November 8.

Residents protested the plan for the following reasons:

1. increased response time by forty-five seconds
 2. loss of \$10,000 on taxes of Shimkus land
 3. the old firehouses, on the National Listing of Historic Buildings, once vacant would be of an uncertain future
 4. in the past, merging of two engine companies (#7 and #3 in North Hartford and #11 and #12 in West End) eventually resulted in the elimination of some fire fighting apparatus
 5. The ladder truck now on Franklin Avenue fits in the building at Engine Company #15, the same place the city says is too small for a ladder truck!
 6. Calls for service for both engine companies were up 50% since 1985.
- Combined, nearly 2000 calls for service would make this new fire station the most active in city.

Resident Bill Cieri, a life long Hartford resident and a forty year veteran of the Hartford Fire Department: "Then I found out they [the City] already had the damn contractor appointed to do the job before they went on the bond issue. It was a South End politician [Bruno Mazzulo]. Then the party that was going to sell the property [Shimkus] was going to buy Engine Company #9 building on New Britain Avenue and Forster Street and use it for it an attorney's office and he was going to sell the property where he is at now."

On November 2, 1994, thirty residents stood on the corner of Engine Company #9 property in cold and wind to oppose plan for 'superstation'. "We're flushing down their plan," Jackie Fongemie yelled as she threw play money into a toilet bowl the group set outside the station. Maureen Kelly, a thirty-four year resident of Cumberland Street said, "I don't think shutting them down is in the best interest of the city." [225] The resident's campaign also included countless phone calls, flyers, and red and white lawn signs.

On November 8, the 'superstation' appeared on the ballot for its final resolution. On election day many people stood at the polls, passing out literature and reminding voters that the plan was not a good one. Some volunteers were standing at the polls all day long, for fourteen hours! More than 3,400 voted 'no', defeating the unpopular plan by more than two to one. Cieri: "Avery Heights [a senior community near Engine Company #9] was a big supporter. Election Day they picked people up on buses and brought them to the voting place. I almost flipped when they told me that. They were behind it, but Jesus, they got about seven, eight hundred people up there at least!"

Closing of Connecticut Bank and Trust (CBT) branch office in South West

In August 1990 at a meeting in Kennelly School, one hundred residents, three state representatives and three city council members tried to convince three CBT senior vice presidents that closing the branch at 401 New Britain Avenue was a bad idea. Area business would suffer, as well as students of Trinity College and elderly who

do not have transportation to take them two miles to a downtown or Franklin Avenue bank branch. "If you're concerned about the community and about the city of Hartford," said Grandview Terrace resident (and later Mayor of Hartford) Mike Peters to a room of applause, "I think you should really take a look at what you're doing." [171]

Residents challenged the city to withdraw \$24 million in deposits if the bank closed the branch. The bank closed its doors on August 31, 1990. Senator William Dibella and Representative John Fonfara said they would ask other banks to consider operating the branch. One man referred to the proposal as "1 percent of hope". If a new bank was not found, Councilwoman Kathleen Collins said she would ask the city council to study whether the city should remove its money. [172] This campaign failed as a new bank was never found, and city deposits remained with CBT.

Frog Hollow

Home Ownership Made Easy (HOME)

"It's (HOME) still probably the most single constructive thing that's been done in HART's history."

— Jack Dollard

In May 1982, sixty Frog Hollow residents took representatives from Connecticut Bank and Trust (CBT) and Aetna on a tour. The officials agreed to support the residents' Housing Action Plan. Earlier, the group had filed a complaint with the Federal Reserve Board under the Community Reinvestment Act, challenging the merger between CBT and Orange National Bank. This was the first public protest of a bank merger ever filed in New England. [107] In 1981, CBT had given one home improvement loan of \$5000 in Frog Hollow. "At CBT's pace," said Susan Snyder of Barry Square, "it would take 269 years to fix up the housing in this area. I can't see waiting that long." The financing officials agreed to bring a financial package back to the neighborhood in thirty days.

In August 1982, CBT offered a \$3 million fund for real estate loans in Frog Hollow if HART removed its challenge to the Orange Bank merger. All loans were at 14% and no points when the program began in 1982. [This was 2% lower than the going rate at that time]. Qualified applicants would also have to live in their property for at least five years. [107] Three hundred people attended a celebration in November 1982, topped off with a "Housing Action" cake that showed a happy building over the slogan, "Success through organization." [108]

Several months passed with little movement with the program. Residents said that they needed to prod CBT at every opportunity to make sure things moved forward. As of March 1983, only \$300,000 had been loaned. The bank again became defensive. Senior Vice President Oliver Park told one resident, "You have done violence to our relationship, and things are going to have to change between us to continue our relationship. If you pray for housing in your churches, you'll do more good than we at the Bank can do." [109]

In April 1983, Frog Hollow residents went to CBT's annual stockholder meeting at the Old State House to follow-through on a commitment to reinvest in neighborhoods. As investors filed into the Old State House, residents handed them

flyers that blared: "CBT: Can't Be Trusted" and detailed the bank's broken promises. Chairman Connolly ran in from the rain just as the meeting was to begin. "We caught him", wrote Laura Boudreaux of Center City, "to present him personally with a letter of invitation to the next Frog Hollow Housing meeting. When pushed for a response, he said only that he would have to read the letter, then dashed off to announce CBT's staggering profits to the waiting shareholders." [110]

It is not certain how many families bought through this program, but there is no doubt that many did benefit.

In the late-1980's, HART revisited the banking and reinvestment issues.

Boucher:

"In 1987, Northeast Savings had a branch on Park and Broad Street that they decided to close. People already thought there was too much disinvestment in the area, and that they could not accept the bank's leaving. We didn't think we had much of a chance, but despite that, people wanted to fight because of the publicity it would generate, so if future banks tried the same thing they might think twice.

"We began to look for allies. We went to Broad Park Development Corporation for help. [In the early 1980's Broad Park had a homeownership program in Frog Hollow, but discontinued it after their funds ran out]. John Gregory Davis from Immaculate Conception Church who was the leader of the Frog Hollow Housing Coalition (FHHC) went to meet with the director of Broad Park. John explained the disinvestment, the damage it would cause. The director then said that they had known about the closing for months and didn't think it was a big deal. It so happened that Broad Park even owned the building that the bank rented! There was a lot of anger at Broad Park around that issue for not letting the neighborhood know what was happening.

"The group did do a mini-action on the shareholders of Northeast Savings. There were only a half dozen people, but the publicity it generated definitely created a ripple among the other banks, which helped us gain support for the home ownership program that we would go on to create. The potential for negative press helped us negotiate for better deals."

These and other efforts in the late 1980's built on HART's earlier community reinvestment challenges. Michael Menatian, former HART organizer:

"After the Northeast Savings issue, it became clear to residents in the Frog Hollow Housing Coalition that bank would need to play a key role, a role they were not already playing to help stabilize the neighborhood.

"In 1987 and 1988 hundreds of residents in Frog Hollow were being displaced. Why? absentee landlords were converting houses in to commercial office space, thus throwing families on the street. Houses were selling at such over inflated prices the landlords were charging huge rents to support their mortgages.

"HART had to take action, but what all the non-profit developers said we had to develop housing that people could afford. We thought there must be another way. We wanted to assist residents in purchasing the present housing stock. This would stabilize the community and stop the displacement. This way they would own the home, and could

not be forced out.

"We were not sure why people could not buy homes. Our idea was to invite several banks to come out to the community and see if they could assist people in purchasing a home.

"In 1989 HART held its first Housing Fair. Over three hundred people attended this event were eight banks sitting down with each person to see if they could buy a home. Only ten people were approved for a loan. Then members of F.H.H.C. talked to the 300 people and to the banks to find out what was wrong. We soon found out that the underwriting guidelines these banks were using were created for a middle class suburban community, not a low and moderate income inner city community.

In November 1989, six years after HART's fight with Connecticut Bank and Trust, Connecticut National Bank [which had purchased the closed Connecticut Bank and Trust] became the first participant in the Frog Hollow Housing Coalition's "Home Ownership Made Easy Program" (HOME), designed to make it easier for lower-income families to qualify for mortgages. Under this new program there are less stringent qualifying guidelines, such as a five percent down payment and a special interest rate two percent lower than the bank's normal rates. CNB contributed \$2 million, enough to cover twenty to thirty mortgages. [151]

Menatian:

"We developed our own program with the very people who hoped to buy their first home. It worked. We created a program so that a family making less than \$20,000 a year could buy a house. Then these 300 people went head to head with each bank. Bank V.P.'s came out to public meetings where residents expected bank support. The tables were turned! These very same bankers who said only a few months ago you can not get a loan. They were now being lectured on a new program and being told to fund it. The banks responded and have funded the program to the tune of thirty million dollars!

"Based on HART's experience with banks in the past, we knew we had to go beyond asking for a million dollars, holding a press conference and forgetting about it. In fact, much of the money HART received in the past was not used. Why? Menatian: "Having a commitment for money is nothing, unless you have a program that generates qualified people to apply for a program that addresses their needs. We had to develop a program that worked, we had to hold a series of six workshops to get people prepared to buy a home, and we had to actually manage the entire program. That is what made HOME successful. It was created developed and managed buy the very same people who benefited from it!"

HOME workshops provide credit counseling and information on home inspections and the real estate agent's role, while explaining the mysteries of getting a mortgage and answering questions about selecting a lawyer or what happens at the closing. Guidelines include income restrictions and maximum loan amounts based on the type of house purchased. Prospective homeowners must also promise to live on the premises.

Footprints: Diane Dawes, HOME Buyer

"How about these results?", wrote Dawes, "we at the HOME Program, through group effort, got Mechanics Bank to re-evaluate the HOME Program and reinvest one half a million dollars for another year so that low income families may buy homes in Hartford."

In February 1992, Mechanics was so impressed with the HOME program they sent a letter stating, 'The HOME Program is the most well thought out and best managed I've ever been privileged to be associated with. Mechanics Savings Bank will continue its involvement in the program because it symbolizes what can be accomplished when community groups and private enterprises pool their resources to improve the neighborhood which we all call home.'

In 1993 it was time for Mechanics to renew their support of the HOME program. We were suddenly told that Mechanics president, Mr. Gerwig, felt that they "have given enough" and that "they can make more money with the State's new CHAMP program (Connecticut Home Buyers Affordable Mortgage Payment program)."

Dawes: "We could not understand what Mechanics was trying to say after such favorable support as mentioned above, so we invited Mechanics President Ed Gerwig and State Representative Tom Ritter to a meeting to discuss this problem. Tom Ritter came; Mr. Gerwig did not come, call or send a representative."

"In speaking with Mr. Ritter, we let him know that the HOME program was being denied because Mechanics Bank felt that they could make more money with the CHAMP program which Mr. Ritter had sponsored. Representative Ritter told us that both programs are good programs and neither one should be disqualified only because you can make more or less money. Mr. Ritter then said he would support the HOME program and make every effort to make sure that we got the support to continue."

In February 1993, Mr. Gerwig sent a letter stating he was disappointed that we somehow had misunderstood their commitment to the HART program. Their so-called 'commitment' was not to reinvest any money but to continue participating in HART's annual Housing Fair and invite HART representatives to join them in creating the CHAMP program.

Mechanics Bank also stated in this same letter that "We feel this program (CHAMP) has the potential to enable us to continue funding mortgages for members of HART." Either they did not do their homework or assumed we had not done ours for they cater to two very different income levels.

Dawes: "The only thing I can say about the CHAMP program is I couldn't use it and I'm sure it would not benefit many who fall in the same income bracket as myself (below \$40 thousand a year)."

"Finally, in May 1993, we received a letter from Mechanics Bank stating they would be committing one half of a million dollars to the HART program and would consider additional commitments on an annual basis.

"This goes to show that when the going gets tough, we at HART can get TOUGHER!" [187]

HOME Program Highlights

Over thirty million dollars and 185 people bought homes from 1989 to 1995. Participating lenders include: Fleet, Shawmut, Northeast Savings, Peoples Bank, Bank of Boston Connecticut, Advest Bank and Mechanic Savings Bank. Low-interest downpayment assistance is provided by Trinity College and Hartford Hospital.

Boucher:

"HOME worked. Many of the leaders from banks and business were skeptical that it would work. The non-profit community development groups in the area told us we were fools and that we were misleading people into thinking they could own a home for just hundreds a month."

Footprints: Once Dreamers, Now Homeowners

Nellie Rivera, a 26-year-old mother of four, never dreamed she could own a home, but she and her children now live on Harbison Street in a house Rivera recently purchased.

In 1994, Nerissa Allen and Donald Joseph bought a three-family house with a four-car garage and finished basement on Shultas Place, with only a 5% down payment and a fixed-rate mortgage with no points.

Richard I. Closs Sr., a former HART board member and program graduate, said that the program teaches buyers to take care of what they own and helps to better the community, because homeowners living in their properties get more involved in their neighborhoods than absentee landlords. [189]

As of 1995, more than 185 families have made their dreams come true through HART's HOME program.

Alex Rodriguez, a HART board member and HOME program graduate, said the program gives people the knowledge and skills to buy a house. "If you are motivated and set your mind to what your goal is, you can achieve it."

Rodriguez: "HOME empowers people who were doomed to eternal renting. With this opportunity and information, we realized that we can all buy a home. Our home buyers have a better sense of belonging to the neighborhood because of this program. Once the home is bought, we've found that many transform their little houses into beautiful castles."

Stanley V. Tucker, Slumlord

HART and Stanley V. Tucker have at least one thing in common: both have had a memorable impact on Hartford neighborhoods dating back to 1975. In October 1975 landlord Stanley Tucker was invited to a neighborhood meeting to discuss his properties on Allen Place and Hamilton Street. He refused to attend the meeting. [102]

In March 1983 Tucker was voted 'slumlord of the month' by HART for his apartment building at 121 Allen Place. Tucker had kept tenants there without hot water for a month. [109] The apartment house sits among elegant Queen Anne-style and Victorian homes, along with modest two and three family homes at the



David Martinez (standing), Hartford resident and former HART president, bought a house and pays less each month for his mortgage than he paid for rent. Martinez: "You hear a lot of bad things about Hartford. Those things won't change unless we make a commitment to make Hartford what we want it to be."

edge of the Trinity College campus. The neighborhood is ethnically mixed, populated by many older Irish, French Canadians, African-Americans and Hispanics.

Jane Murphy recalls a major fight in the middle 1980's with Tucker over four properties that he owned in Parkville:

"We've always had to fight Tucker. His Parkville buildings were in constant disrepair, with roaches, no heat, no lights, broken doors and so on. Working with some of his good tenants on Capitol Avenue, we started by asking the city to foreclose on Tucker's property. But then we decided that the bank would be a better target, that they were really the bad guys.

"Next we had a rally at the State House Square downtown, having a sit-in at the office of Northeast Savings. We refused to leave until someone met with us about foreclosing on Tucker's properties. He owed a lot of back taxes. The bank said they would expedite foreclosure if we could find another buyer or developer, which we did."

Before Tucker built his building at 121 Allen Place, forty year Allen Place resident Beatrice LaFlamme remembered how proudly a Mr. Fricke cared for his beautiful Victorian house before it was torn down in 1971. LaFlamme:

"He had a rose garden in the back and all kinds of pretty flowers and everything. His house went down little by little, and then he died. Then the lady that was taking care of him — she died, and the house got sold, and then first thing you know Tucker took the house down and then built this apartment building."

"It was so peaceful then," said LaFlamme who is retired and lives with her 87 year old father Joseph in their 19th century Victorian gray and white house next door. [175]

In October of 1989 Tom Condon of the *Courant* wrote: "Tucker's four story brick building isn't hooked up to Metropolitan District Commission water, but instead from an illegal well. In housing court, Tucker's defense is that his well water is curing the illnesses — AIDS in one instance — of his tenants. 'I can't say

it's the water itself,' said Tucker, a tubular-looking, toupeed man of indeterminate late middle-age. Don't run out and buy a bottle of it just yet. In 1983 MDC shut him off for failure to pay a bill. Tucker says the bill was \$240. The MDC's total differs ever so slightly; it was \$6,600." [153]

What was it like to live Tucker's 121 Allen Place? "A sink fell off the wall. My oven door fell off. There's no maintenance at all," said Billy Turner, a tenant who said he'd give up his apartment to see the building shut down. Tucker insisted the building is fine. He said he knows nothing of drugs in the building (police seized 33 bags of cocaine in a June 1989 raid) and no rat problem. [153]

At a November 1989 Zoning Board of Appeals hearing, tenants of Stanley Tucker brought a nest of live mice, jars of dead rodents, roaches in jelly jars and pictures of garbage to stop Tucker from adding more apartments to 121 Allen Place. "I find ladies from the street shooting drugs in my hallways," said tenant Abdallah Hatel. At the time Tucker owed \$145,000 in back taxes. [154]

LaFlamme described some of the problems that Tucker's building created:

"When my mother died, my dad was out working in the garden one day, and I had come home from lunch and gone back to East Hartford to work. He had left the door open, and someone came into my bedroom, and took all my gold jewelry and my mother's wedding ring.

"The next day we had rotten eggs thrown at our house. Another time someone threw a can of motor oil through the screen and several windows. And another night they shot a great big bottle of beer, and it hit the porch. Still another time my neighbor Elinor Navitsky got hit in the face with a piece of rock that they threw in her window on the other side of the building. She was sleeping on the couch and when she woke up she was bleeding above the eye.

"One afternoon tenants in Tucker's building had a pit bull — the whole gang of them have pit bulls — and they were pulling it by the ears — hanging it by the ears, up in the air, pulling it by the tail. They were torturing the animals, and I went out there and I was so mad at them. I said, 'If you don't stop — if that's the only kind of entertainment you believe you can find, I'm calling the police. I was shocked. I couldn't believe the anger that came out of me. I was screaming at them! And they were all looking at me. They couldn't believe it was coming out of me. [laughs] They finally let him alone.'" In April 1991 police rounded up four pit bulls and a wolf in the back yard.

Menatian:

"Since 1975, 121 Allen Place had been a thorn in the side of the community. Despite all HART effort it was business as usual for Tucker. Since I started at HART there was not a week that went by when someone did not mention Tucker's name. I had not addressed that issue, because people were almost numb to Tucker. But in 1989 things really got out of hand. Drug trafficking, loud music, and prostitution activity was rampant.

"It was then that residents working with HART decided to take action. For two years we were a thorn in Tucker's side. His building was regularly inspected by housing code. The police made hundreds of drug arrests. We prevented Tucker from renting two apartment on the roof of the building. Yet dispute all our efforts, he continued. We felt like we

were banging our head against the wall."

As things heated up at the Tucker buildings, in February 1989 police seized a three family brick house at 33 York Street, the scene of flagrant drug trafficking activity. Authorized by the United States Attorney, this was the first time Hartford police had seized a house because it was being used to break a law. Police found 102 bags of marijuana packed for street sale and a pound of marijuana valued at \$2000 in the house. A semiautomatic pistol and rifle were also seized. [152]

After the York Street seizure, residents realized that the Federal Government had a successful tool in the federal asset forfeiture procedure. Allen Place residents met with then Hartford Police Chief Ronald Loranger, Director of License and Inspection Abe Ford, and U.S. Marshals. Ford initially was ambivalent about the idea of seizing the Tucker building, suggesting that nothing could be done. By this point in this three year campaign, even some residents weren't so sure this was a good idea. Loranger then stepped up to the plate, and talked about the more than 300 calls for service to that address and the need for strong action. Since 1989 police had gone to the apartment building 368 times, including charges of narcotics, rape, robbery burglary, larceny, possession of weapons, assaults and breach of peace. [174]

Finally, the forces rallied together. Tucker's last Hartford building was seized on August 17, 1991 by United States Federal Marshalls. On that day Tucker looked haggard and worried walking up Allen Place towards a throng of federal marshals, Drug Enforcement Agency men, a dozen police, neighbors, and television cameras. After talking with reporters and police, claiming his innocence, Tucker shuffled alone down Allen Place and into history.

Irene Zawacki a resident of nearby Lincoln Street said, "I think it's been festering like a sore on a street that has a lot of nice people. We can't be happier. If you band together anything is possible."

LaFlamme:

"Since then, they closed and blocked all the windows, and since it's been very quiet. Just like night and day. I wake up at night and I don't hear any noise. It's just so different. I didn't realize how hyper and nervous I was until it was closed down, and I was looking for noises. You know, I was so nervous that every noise I heard, I was looking out the window because I was not secure.

"I love HART, and I'll tell you why. I find the meetings exciting, and I learned more things through HART. I learned how city managed city government, and how the cities have managed. And I also found out how stupid they can be. [laughs] I thought they were supposed to be so smart, and they are not all smart." [laughs]

Tucker nemesis and Allen Place resident Bea LaFlamme.



HART and Real 'Community Policing'

An area of concern common to HART's twenty years has been public safety. While HART has not always met with clear success, each fight has always been filled with tremendous energy and passion. The following are a sampling of stories, including efforts to change how the police department responds to crime problems and deploys officers in the neighborhoods.

Footprints: Chief of Police Bernie Sullivan

In 1982, Acting Police Chief Bernie Sullivan told WTIC radio that he would not attend any more neighborhood meetings. [107]

Sullivan:

"In the structured meetings it was probably more than fifty percent, no, it was probably ninety-five percent adversarial. They (HART) kicked the hell out of you. But that was their role in life. And you have to live with that. I stopped going to meetings. I got very offended. [223]

"HART had an agenda, I had mine. I felt very strongly as the police chief that I had an obligation to police the city not to police any one particular neighborhood, which is difficult, sometimes, for people in a neighborhood to understand that you have to balance their needs with everybody else's." [223]

rupted and promised to put an auxiliary policeman on foot patrol, three nights a week, alternating the patrol from one street to another in the area. He also he said he'd make a cruiser available to patrol those streets. [30]

In September of 1980, the City Council mandated that the department reorganize from the six year old five district system set up by Chief Hugo Masini to a centralized policing system. [31] Alta Lash: "HART was key in getting rid of Masini, who had become a computer-technocrat. He did not care at all what the neighborhoods wanted."

On February 18, 1981 HART invited the new Chief George Sicaras to a Frog Hollow community meeting. Roz Strickland invited the chief on a walking tour of the neighborhood. "This is where we live, and we all walked down here tonight. We'll show you where crimes are being committed and what it's like to walk down Park Street," she said at the meeting. As the crowd voiced its approval, Sicaras hesitantly agreed to take the tour.

In November 1975, fifty residents of Park and Broad Street confronted City Manager Curtin in his office and convinced him to recommend assignment of two permanent police foot patrolmen in their neighborhood. After twenty minutes, Curtin emerged from his office. [100] According to the HART newsletter from that time: seventy-five people met with Curtin, and the people got what they wanted. [102]

In September 30, 1976, angry Franklin Avenue residents walked out of a neighborhood meeting with police, saying they'd take the law into their own hands because police won't offer more protection. In a meeting with Captain Donald Higgins, police commander for the South End city district, about seventy-five residents asked for a foot patrol in the Franklin Avenue and Barry Square neighborhoods. Higgins listened to residents one by one stand up in the pews of the basement chapel at St. Augustine's Church to tell tales of neighborhood terror. As emotion, created by the stories, reached a fever pitch Higgins inter-

Starting at St. Anne's parish hall at the corner of Park and Putnam Streets, the group of fifty proceeded down Park Street towards Broad Street. As the tour reached the intersection of Park and Babcock, a fight between two youths broke out on the opposite side of the street. Not sure at first whether or not the fight was staged for the Police Chief and the audience, the crowd stopped to observe the action. As it became apparent the fight was real, Sicaras summoned a nearby officer to separate the youths. The crowd applauded as Sicaras escorted one of the men to a squad car. [29]

Community Policing?

In the late 1980's 'community policing' became the catch-phrase of law enforcement and community groups. Elements of this 'new style' of policing were drawn from earlier approaches incorporating problem solving versus simply responding to each incident as it is reported to the police. At the time, criminal justice experts said that personal contact and the constant presence of foot patrols represent is the key to the larger issue of effective 'community policing', where police are meant to be visible, available and solving neighborhood concerns. HART has been a proponent of this approach since the beginning in 1975.

In December 1988, 300 people from the HART-led "Coalition for more Police Protection Now!" went to a City Council meeting and demanded foot patrols for their neighborhoods. There were thirty-nine patrols at the time, the same number as when the group had begun meeting over a year and half earlier. Chief Sullivan said that there's not enough manpower to fill more. Sullivan had frequently said that increased foot patrols do not necessarily mean a decrease in crime. At the time, Hartford's crime rate, per capita, was the fourth highest in the country. Murders were also at the highest level since 1980.

"Maybe he (Chief Sullivan) thinks he knows better than residents who pay their taxes," said HART President Inez Pegeas. "Maybe his perception is that people without degrees in criminology should not be empowered to make decisions about their lives — but he's wrong." [147]

"Quite candidly, if I thought foot patrols would solve all my problems at four o'clock this afternoon I'd have everyone walking a beat," said Bernard R. Sullivan. [148]

Eventually, foot patrols increased to about 80% of staffing levels. This increase was short-lived, as in October 1988 the police department launched its "Community Service Officer" program. This was based on suggestions in large measure from a downtown-dominated 'crime task force' chaired by former Deputy Mayor Nick Carbone.

The new program all but eliminated foot patrols, with five CSO's in five of the city's busiest neighborhoods. "It's OK as an addition to, but not in lieu of foot patrols," said Inez Pegeas in April 1989. "This is more of a bait and switch tactic. We will not be hoodwinked into thinking one can do the job of the other." Sullivan soon planned to pull eleven officers from foot patrols and give them the eleven new CSO assignments. This program continues today, with mixed results. [150]

Boucher:

"I think that the foot patrol fight was an example of a couple years of lots of energy, lots of work. We made things progress, but then our leadership got real political. They began to test the political partisan waters,

running for office. Making little deals that would benefit their self interest and less about winning on the issue and building a community campaign." [214]

These experiences with policing issues would set the stage for a major battle and victory with police in responding to severe gang violence in 1992, and more recently a less-than successful effort to stem police corruption. Both of these stories are told in the next section.

Frog Hollow Revitalization Committee

"I recall how HART used to make politicians shake [laughs]."

— Carrie Saxon Perry, former Hartford Mayor

HART Anti-Drug Collaborative

After the seizure of the Tucker building, HART reflected on what made that issue so successful. Could that approach be applied to other issues? An important component in the Tucker fight was involving key players, such as city departments and neighborhood institutions such as Trinity College. What if this group could continue coming together and take action on other issues?

HART began to test this by convening the 'Anti-Drug Collaborative', chaired by resident and foot patrol veteran Inez Pegeas. This marked the first time that residents met on a regular with key private and public officials to identify and take action on community issues. Early successes of the group included drug free school zones and the creation of youth and drug prevention programs 'Mi Casa' and 'Organized Parents Make a Difference' (OPMAD). These stories will be told later in this chapter.

Beyond the Tucker fight, another inspiration for the Anti-Drug Collaborative came from an exciting action in Washington, D.C. Boucher:

"In 1987 or so, HART had attended a National People's Action conference in Washington with other groups from around the country. One issue then was drugs, and how families were falling apart. How could Washington help neighborhoods fight the drug problem? So on a Monday morning, they took five busloads of people to the Department of Education to try meeting with the Secretary of Education Bill Bennett, which at the time had a lot of 'drug-free school' money. Not much of that money was going to community groups.

"We get up the elevator, up the stairs. There are five hundred people packed in his office. Bennett's staff was very nervous. When the police came, people cheered and gave them flowers. They were really put off by that. We occupied his office for more than an hour. People were chanting and singing. When the police asked who was in charge, everyone's response was 'we all are!'. That made it hard to throw us out. Finally we met with the head staff person. We asked to meet with Bennett. He said we couldn't meet with Bennett because he was in an airplane flying to some city. We asked why he couldn't be called. So the staff did call, and a few minutes later Bennett, over the phone, agreed to meet with our group in thirty days.

"A month later we had one of our leaders fly down for the meeting, hooking up with two dozen others from other parts of the country. Bennett sat there, and asked roughly what people wanted. We asked for a demonstration program for ten cities to pay for an organizer to tackle the drug problem. He went on a tantrum, and said how bad we were for disrupting his office and that most people wouldn't give our group the time of day. In the end though, he said that what this country needs are a 'bunch of assholes' like you with the spunk to do things about the problems that are out there.

"Hartford became one of ten cities as part of this program, featuring a collaboration with residents and city officials to approach the drug and crime problem. The Anti-Drug Collaborative (later evolving into the 'Frog Hollow Revitalization Committee') grew as a result, and may not have happened without that trip to Washington."

Frog Hollow Revitalizes

As the Anti-Drug Collaborative met, neighbors, city officials and institutional representatives began getting together to focus on a number of Frog Hollow issues that were eating away at the community.

Ivan Backer:

"You know, the most recent chapter of the relationship between Southside Institute and Neighborhood Alliance (SINA) and HART really goes back about three years (1992), when HART approached Trinity College President Tom Gerety through Eddie Perez (Director of Community Relations at Trinity: "Trinity decided, 'how can we figure out how to solve some of this shit together?'), to have the institutions involved in what was called the 'Frog Hollow Re-

Footprints: Drug Free School Zones

In January 1990 HART held an anti-drug rally at Christ Lutheran Church with more than 150 people. Jack Eicholtzer, who had almost lost his Park Street laundry business to arsonists, shouted at the rally, "We can beat this problem! We have to do it for the kids".

Eicholtzer's laundry was apparently set on fire in December 1988 on the order of a suspected drug dealer who feared that Eicholtzer's frequent calls to police would hurt his drug trade.

Children from area elementary schools exhibited anti-drug posters. One of the posters, drawn by Jesus Vega, a student at M.D. Fox School, was picked as the design for a sign that would denote drug-free school zones. This design later appeared on the front cover of the nationally distributed 'Weekly Reader' magazine.

Mayor Carrie Saxon Perry proposed the drug-free school zone program at the next city council meeting. Signs were posted 1,000 feet from each school. Anyone convicted of selling or using drugs in that area would face additional charges. [162] "Drugs are a big concern even at elementary schools where we've heard of eight year olds selling drugs or being used as watchouts for drug dealers," said Keith Bolling a McDonough school parent. [163]

vitalization Committee.' I think this has been the most successful chapter in our cooperation.

"One thing that I think we've learned through all this is that we can't just pursue our own agendas — we have to cooperate, and to work together, and it's only in working together that we can hope to arrive at solutions that are durable enough, that will make a difference. My favorite analogy is that if you look at the city as sort of a three legged stool, and one leg is the neighborhood and one leg is the city government and the other leg is business and the institutions, in a sense, each of those entities has the power to say, 'no' and to stop something from happening." [201]

Jack Dollard, a prominent local architect and long-time Hartford supporter:

"When we first got together as a Coalition we used to have lunch over at Camila's — President Tom Gerety from Trinity and all the other institutional people would sit together, and then we'd all sit together on one side, and it took about four meetings before we finally started to mix it up, and people weren't sitting with their own gang and what have you."

Menatian:

"It seemed like in the 1980's problems were simple and we could solve them. In the 1990's things really changed. Drugs and gangs became an increasing real threat and there was a real sense of break-down of order and discipline. And there was also a vacuum of power; no one had any power to address problems this vast. It was at this time though the help of Jack Dollard that we thought we had to approach the institutions. They were facing the same issues and could not do anything about them. So we did and after Trinity got involved, Hartford Hospital and the Institute of Living joined with us. And with the assistance of the Mayor and Jeff Bayer, we made real change. Every other week Jeff Bayer chaired the city department head meetings in the community. He made sure they did what the residents wanted them to do. Buildings were inspected and repaired, streets lights were put up, streets were cleaned etc."

Carrie Saxon Perry, Hartford Mayor at the start of the Revitalization Committee in Frog Hollow:

"HART has evolved into extraordinary sophistication. I was always very impressed with the research done on issues — it sort of balanced the confrontational style. If it had been rabel-raising without the facts, it would have been less impressive. HART makes them (politicians) think by being serious, being persistent, and not giving up.

"The idea of the Frog Hollow Revitalization Committee, from the City, was to concentrate our efforts in one area. The City Manager and I attended the meetings. We also assigned an Assistant City Manager, Jeff Bayer, to push so that the City Departments had to know that this had a priority. So HART's Frog Hollow was first, then Stowe Village, Upper Albany, and Asylum Hill. We started with Frog Hollow because of HART's extraordinary sophistication and organization. Any time you do something, you want to raise the probability of success."

LaFlamme remembers an early revitalization meeting:

"Ralph Borras, the Assistant City Manager, came to a meeting at Christ Lutheran Church, and we told him all of the things that we were doing here, and listed all our grievances, and he wrote them all down. He had a secretary. He said, 'I promise you in two weeks, I'll give you a report card. Everything is going to be taken care of just like that.' Everyone was so — Irene Zawacki said, 'Oh, boy, what a wonderful man!' I said, 'Well, let's wait and see.' Two weeks went by and nothing — we didn't hear a thing. Two months went by. So we finally started asking him, 'What's going on?' He said, 'Well, you didn't complain to us or call us to tell us that you were unhappy.' And here he had promised he was going to get us a report and straighten all these things out. So at the following big meeting we had, still nothing had been done. I couldn't believe it either. [laughs] HART had plastered all of his promises on the wall, in great big letters. [laughs] He came in and he saw that, and he was so angry. We finally got him to sit down and the meeting went on, and we gave him a score of zero on his report card. [laughs]

"Afterwards I said to Ralph, 'What's wrong? You look like you've got an awful big chip on your shoulder.' He said, 'You know, you're lucky I stayed here. I was going to walk right out. I don't have to take this crap that you people are giving me.' He was definitely very angry and upset at us. I don't think he even wants to come back here again. We were so glad when we heard that he had left the city." [laughs] [230]

Along with this group of private and public stakeholders convened by HART, resident leaders embarked on a comprehensive action plan to revitalize the Frog Hollow community.

Prostitution

Pastor Lyle Beckman of Christ Lutheran Church and HART Board Member for two years came to Hartford in 1986. His church, on the corner of Broad and Madison was in the heart of prostitution: "It was just whittling away at our soul because every corner just about in this neighborhood, day and night you would find people prostituting themselves. I found prostitutes in cars in the parking lots. It was just such a humiliating, debilitating, demeaning thing for people to see. Women



U.S. Senator Joseph Lieberman with Pastor Lyle Beckman on 1993 tour of Frog Hollow neighborhood.

who lived in this neighborhood were often times mistaken for prostitutes and they were approached, and that's dehumanizing. Men who were driving through, quite often as they stopped at a red light or stop sign would be propositioned."

Menatian:

"I cannot tell you how many people, cops and other city officials said you will never stop prostitution. It's the oldest profession in the world. Well, the neighborhood said, 'That's not going to happen here'."

David Martinez wrote in a 1992 HART newsletter:

"Hartford's Frog Hollow neighborhood, the community immediately south of the State Capitol Building, has been known throughout the state as a bastion of prostitution. Men from the suburbs travel to Frog Hollow to buy sex from prostitutes.

"Women in the neighborhood constantly complain that they are propositioned by johns while they are waiting for a bus or leaving their home to walk to their car or down the street for a gallon of milk. Johns usually have sex with prostitutes in full view of neighborhood residents, often while parked in front of someone's house, or even in driveways. Residents constantly find used condoms and needles on their front lawns."

In 1992 the Hartford police force made over 500 prostitution related arrests. The police released the names and addresses of those men caught soliciting prostitutes in the community to the newspaper. The state prosecutor helped by not plea bargaining cases. HART continually fed information about prostitution activity to the police. Still, these johns refused to yield. [184]

Residents as well as the Chief Operating Officers of Hartford Hospital, Trinity College and the Institute of Living banded together to form a Revitalization Committee. With the support of the Mayor and City Manager we met every other week to address community problems. Prostitution was one issue of many. The group choose to make this their first issue, proving that the community and institutional partners could have immediate results.

At the request of HART and the support of Police Chief Ronald Loranger, the Hartford Police Department and State's Attorney John Bailey began seizing the cars of johns. HART learned of this law being used in Portland,



Car seizure signs posted in Frog Hollow and other Hartford neighborhoods. Photo by Earl Dotter.

Oregon, where it was shown to have a great impact. [184]

After seizing five cars on one snowy December night, prostitution activity had dropped off dramatically. In the area of Ward and Washington Streets, twelve people were arrested. At a press conference the next day, resident Nancy Galarza said, "The prostitutes have taken over our streets. Our children think it is OK to be a prostitute, but it is not." [185]

Hartford Police Lieutenant Thomas O'Connor said, "We wouldn't be doing this car seizure if we didn't think it would work. But we see people who are exposing themselves to the risk of death (via AIDS) who seem more concerned about losing their cars than facing actual death." [186]

The Connecticut Civil Liberties Union and the *Courant* Editorial Board were outraged with the constitutional rights of the johns who residents felt were destroying the community. "Too bad!" said Dorothy Santiago. "They are violating the law by paying for sex in front of our children. I have no mercy for them." [187] Due process is still guaranteed. The owner of a seized vehicle receives a full hearing in front of a judge to determine whether or not the vehicle was indeed used as a means in committing a crime. "Those who criticize do not live in the neighborhood," said Martinez, "and have not offered any answers in the past or alternatives now." [184]

Menatian:

"After the first five cars were taken, a superior court judge had to rule if the state

Footprints: Lyle Beckman

"When I arrived in Hartford in 1986 things at Christ Lutheran Church had slowed down, almost literally closed down for the summer. So there was no classes, no Sunday school, no summer program. I was very bored that summer. But not long after I arrived, who should come knocking at my door but Michael Menatian, who at the time was a relatively new organizer at HART. He started explaining what HART was and I hate to admit it, but this was my first exposure to the whole concept of community organizing and I liked what I heard. I particularly liked the concept of empowering all kinds of people in neighborhoods to respond to and also influence and participate in city government."

"When I first came to Hartford HART was perceived as being a negative force. I remember members of the congregation were hysterical when they first learned that HART was going to start using the building for some meetings and that I was on the HART board. They said, 'Do you like those people?' 'Yes, I do."

"There are always people within the organization challenging its leaders to think things through in maybe a different way or to try something new. It's not a dull, drab organization."

"We actually pray for HART every now and then at our Sunday service . . . we never ask God to answer a prayer in a specific way, but we do ask for the strength and patience to endure certain situations or the wisdom in order to know exactly how to address a certain situation. . . . that's my parting words to you, to know that HART on occasion is prayed for."

After years of little success fighting prostitution, Rev. Beckman was soon to find that his prayers would get answers and action."



HART's Nancy Galarza with Speaker of the House Tom Ritter (left), State Representative Juan Figueroa and other House members announce new seizure law to the press.

could conduct this activity. The Judge rules against us, saying the police can't keep the cars. But she does say that we can change the law to make it work. Jack Bailey calls and says, 'You know, we're prepared to change the law.' I'll never forget this. David (Martinez, HART President) is on TV. David said, 'This is what neighborhood people will do. We're not stopping. We're going to win this.' When I heard that — I knew we would. And that brought out the best in us — to bring out the best in this community, and in all of us. And we won. We had people in the State Capital who had never set foot in the State Capital, let alone — never been in the hallways of the State Capital — and they'd be the people that lived in Hartford all their lives! And they changed the state law! And they got rid of prostitutes from streets that had Johns and pimps and prostitutes for years!" [207]

The State changed the law to allow for seizure of cars after the community, Chief State's Attorney John Bailey and others worked with the Speaker of the House Tom Ritter and State Senator William Dibella. Ritter successfully attached the law change as an amendment to another bill. Despite strong opposition from Hartford Representative Richard Tulisano, who had opposed another anti-prostitution effort in 1983, Governor Weicker signed into law the bill legalizing the seizure of johns' cars on January 9, 1993.

Beckman:

"I see prostitution as being probably the most visible change in our neighborhood and I see that solely as the effort of HART and the people that kept bringing it up as an issue."

Footprints: Michael Menatian

"When they [the bad guys] know that it's the hardcore group that's going to be right down their throats every day of the week, and it's our life ambition to win, they're going to know it, and they're going to cave in — that's the only way to make change. The system is not going to react to, 'Let's have a forum on a problem.' I mean, that's liberal bullshit. Change is by force, period. Power against power. And that's what we did twenty-four hours a day. [207]

"The neighborhood people are, to me — there are so many people in this neighborhood that are worth their weight in gold a hundred times over. They're pure, honest, hard-working people, because they put their lives on the line and do some tough things to make our community a better place."

Gang Violence

"I think the turning point in Frog Hollow was all the gang violence. If it didn't happen, it was something we should have started because it woke everybody up for miles around." [216]

— Jack Dollard

Beginning the summer of 1992, Hartford and especially Frog Hollow saw an explosion of youth gang violence unlike any seen before. Would neighbors come out on top, or be held hostage by a well-organized and financed network of drug dealers?

Former HART organizer Mike Gorzoch:

"When I was organizing Frog Hollow we had gangs. We had the 'Savage Nomads' and some others — but they didn't carry guns, and they were almost funny. They were caricatures. They wore combat boots and fatigue pants and tight shirts, and they had beer bellies, and they wore funny hats. You know, they were characters. But they didn't carry guns and shoot people!"

Bob Pawlowski, first publisher of the *Southside News*:

"When we first started here there were gangs, like the Savage Nomads, the Park Street Posse, people like that. But those guys were like the 'Art Carney' type of gangs. They were just dumb guys and they'd beat somebody up or something like that. These guys today are very well organized, they have a lot of money, and they have guns. This is not like a street gang. This is business."

The primary gangs of the early 1990's were called the Latin Kings, Los Solidos, and 20 Love. They were largely organized within the Connecticut prison system during the 1980's. When released from jail and returned to neighborhoods like Frog Hollow, the gang leadership unleashed a powerful, well-organized operation

centered on trafficking of narcotics and enforced by sophisticated firearms.

Menatian:

"The gang stuff, first of all, should have never happened. We were doing a lot, and the city wasn't responding as well as they should have to what was going on. I don't think they knew what was going on as well as they should have. But it happened. That was a do-or-die situation. Either we reclaim the neighborhood or this is it. It's like a decisive battle in the war. And we won that battle. I look back at that year and it was like a tour of duty. I mean, people were getting threatened and killed. That's not easy. People like Dorothy Santiago had two armed policemen in her house with bullet-proof vests, twenty-four hours a day for two days straight. People coming to neighborhood meetings were being told, 'If you go there, we'll shoot you.' And actually cops had stopped those guys and pulled out nine millimeter pistols on these teenagers. This is about as real life as it gets. This is as dangerous as it gets. You had people having their houses burned down. They smashed a HART window. It was clear that it was us against them. It was that simple."

Boucher:

"Everybody in the community was in fear. In June of 1993 I remember folks were sitting around thinking, 'Gee whiz, what are we going to do about all these gang shootings?' People are in fear. People are paralyzed. People don't want to come forward. People don't want to attend meetings. A few people picked up the spirit by talking about the National Guard. Then we started saying, 'Damn it, why can't we go after other resources that can come into the city and do something about it?' Because at that point, the present city administration was somewhat soft and mellow about all of this. And we really pushed the issue right after that."

Menatian:

"We had a planning meeting at Christ Lutheran Church with several community residents and the three Chief Executive Officers of the three institutions. I'll never forget it. We wrote up a mandate. Tom Gerety the President of Trinity College wrote down our mandate that called for State Police officers to come into the community, and if the city and state did not come in, then we would call in the National Guard. This is how bad the problem was, that the institutions would support this kind of drastic action."

Boucher:

"There were some groups saying that we were being too militaristic or we weren't being sensitive enough to the community. And yet we were having discussions with people in the community who were a hundred percent for this. People that were saying that the controversy tended to be a few people with their own opinions out there — that they didn't really have a base. They were just doing that from their own point of view. But it was a real challenge to HART that night of the big meeting, whether or not there were going to be five people that were going to show up, or if there

were going to be more. Traditionally there would be fifty or sixty people that would show up. And after all these shootings, and after all the fear, and after all these massive headlines one would tend to say that people would not come out to a meeting like that because people would be scared of being identified, how many people showed up?

"Four hundred folks showed up at this meeting. And I think that just shows to you what community organizing can do. People do want to have an outlet. They do want to do something. A lot of the times the media and those people who don't represent folks in the public sector throw a bluff on this stuff and suggest that people don't care.

"At the end of the meeting — it's nine o'clock. Most of the people are ready to get home — put their kids to bed or whatever. After the meeting there was a march to that vacant lot that would later become the police substation. And again, how many people were going to walk to that vacant lot? Did anybody know? With candles — several hundred people walked through the neighborhood that probably a few nights before had gun fire." [214]

400 Frog Hollow Residents Attend Meeting/Declare War on Gangs!

Federal, State and City officials endorsed all of HART's ten point plan at a meeting held at Christ Lutheran Church on September 3, 1993. The Revitalization Committee came up with a Ten Point Plan to crack down on the gang violence and drug activity. The Federal, State and City officials agreed to all ten Points of the Community Response to Gang Violence.

Boucher:

"This Ten Point Plan started more like a bunch of solid, but scattered ideas. Despite the violence and our efforts, the *Hartford Courant* was giving these events and community reaction very little play, and when they did write it was mostly negative. Packaging a 'Ten Point' plan full of positive action steps got the attention of the media."

Governor Lowell Weicker's office agreed to mandate State Troopers to patrol the area with local police. HART's leadership was critical in this. The Frog Hollow Revitalization Committee's solid relationship with Hartford Mayor Carrie Saxon Perry, City Manager Howard Stanback and Chief of Police Jesse Campbell had already developed a preliminary consensus before the big September meeting. When the group met with Governor Weicker, everyone was on the same page.

Prior to the big September meeting, the Hartford State delegation and State Senator William Dibella worked to ensure that Frog Hollow was the recipient of the State Safe Neighborhood Program (to receive a police sub-station in the Frog Hollow neighborhood). This was accepted by HART in a negotiation with Deputy City Manager Jeff Bayer in exchange for a similar program called 'Weed and Seed' for north Hartford's Stowe Village. Twenty officers were targeted to Frog Hollow beginning in August 1994, and a neighborhood 'block-watch' system was developed by HART.

Chief State's Attorney John Bailey agreed to assign special prosecutors to deal with the gang members who are arrested in the area and to ensure an expedited trial and a place for them in the jails.

City Manager Howard Stanback agreed to a curfew for Hartford youths, sup-

port State Troopers in the neighborhood, follow through with the State's Office of Policy and Management for funding a permanent police sub-station for Frog Hollow, and set up a temporary police post in the neighborhood.

Police Chief Jesse Campbell agreed to extend the hours of the Gang Task Force in the area and increase the number of police officers assigned to patrol, Vice and Narcotics were assigned more hours, and set up a temporary police post in the neighborhood.

The Drug Enforcement Agency agreed to continue intensive drug and gang investigations in the area and locate points outside of the city where the drugs are coming in from. The Federal Bureau of Investigation was working on an intensive drug and gang investigation in the area and at points outside of the city also. The F.B.I. also employed 'R.I.C.O.' a Federal statute dealing with racketeering and corruption to attack the drug and gang issues in Frog Hollow. [188]

In a December 1993 article by HART President David Martinez:

"A few months ago, the Frog Hollow neighborhood met with several local, state and federal officials (Chief of Police, the Governor's Office, State Attorney and US Attorney, FBI, DEA, etc) so we could all work together to combat the gang violence in Frog Hollow. Everyone agreed to work with us and an intensive effort began with the state and local police cracking down on crime, also known as 'Operation Liberty'.

"Since then we have had another follow up meeting with these same officials in October to ensure, after Operation Liberty was rumored to be ending, we would have another program in place similar to that of Liberty. The Governor's Office and Chief Campbell announced, although they could not give detailed information, that the state ROCCY (Reclaiming Our Communities/ Comprehensive Youth Strategies) program would be implemented in Hartford.

"We have been successful in really lobbying and speaking out for ROCCY, which will be strong because we will have State Police allocated to us for a long period of time and still have other benefits from Operation Liberty like special prosecutors assigned just to gang issues, and behind the scenes investigation and scrutiny into criminal activity. In fact, at our last meeting, the attorney read us a list of updated information on each of the eighteen gang leadership HART had targeted. All have since been arrested, most have been prosecuted and are still in prison.

"It is imperative that this strong initiative against gang violence include the police enforcement component, which includes arrests, special prosecution and incarceration. All programs: jobs clubs, school programs and recreation, all of which HART is also implementing, will not work if people that would go are afraid to leave their homes, afraid to get shot at."

Menatian:

"I don't know the gangs expected that kind of response. It was incredible — it was like a ton of bricks fell on them. We had German Cable News Network television, CBS here, and none of them could believe that the community got themselves organized, and they called out for these drastic measures, and it was working, and they were thankful.

"The drugs won't disappear. I think it's like a car. You always have

to maintain it. It's like a relationship. You always have to maintain it. It's like a house. You always have to maintain it. I think we overhauled the engine that summer (1993). Now you've got to maintain that engine. If you abuse it again, or if you don't put oil in it or tune it up, it's going to go bad again." [207]

(below) During the summer and fall of 1993, police from the State and Hartford joined forces on Park Street to crack down on severe Frog Hollow gang violence.
(right) HART, in concert with City and State leaders, secured a police 'substation' for Frog Hollow. This station, located at the corner of Ward and Affleck Streets, was funded by the State's 'Safe Neighborhood' Initiative. Photo by Earl Dotter.



HART, Young People, and 'Services'

Organized Parents Make a Difference (OPMAD) and the Mi Casa 'family service center'

While HART and others got tough on gangs, everyone realized that more attention was needed to deal with the severe lack of positive alternatives for young people.

Traditionally, HART had not provided direct services. However the following two programs are examples of how a HART community organizing process (partially in response to severe gang violence in 1992 and priority issues as defined by the HART Anti-Drug Collaborative and the HART Congress) resulted in the creation of 'crime and drug prevention' programs for young people.

Organized Parents Make a Difference (OPMAD)

Organized Parents Make a Difference grew as a result of several waves converging. At an early Anti-Drug Collaborative meeting, April Goff Brown with the City's Youth Service Department and Leah Fichtner of the Hartford Public Schools talked about an after-school program grant called 'ADAPT'. HART accepted the challenge to help involve parents from Burns, Parkville, and McDonough in the program. At the same time, HART was meeting around a number of crime issues. Parent John McKenna:

"Geno Avenoso [former HART Vice President, currently President of the Franklin Avenue Merchants Association] wanted a foot patrol, also, in the South End, along with the President of HART [Inez Pegeas] at the time. And they invited me to a meeting on foot patrols. And the meeting started off with the President of HART saying, 'We have a problem in Hartford crime, and we need to deal with that, and foot patrols seems to be a solution.' And I said, 'Before we go down that road, there's something I have to say. Crime is not a problem. Crime is the symptom. What the problem is, is you have guys that don't have jobs, and the reason they don't have jobs is they didn't get out of school, and the reason they didn't get out of school is they don't have parents that are involved with their education. So what we really want to do, if we wanted to deal with crime — the roots — we've got to get parents at the schools. That was probably 1988.

"Dulcie Giadone (former HART President) was at that meeting. She started getting together with other parents from other schools, and it looked like there was an opportunity for what she heard me say to take place. Schools get together, shared, and then OPMAD came along and said, 'Hey, we're looking for parents.' Once OPMAD got started, I knew that it was the way to go. It's obvious if you want to deal with kids, and if you want to deal with crime, you've got to get them out of high school."

Parent and OPMAD Board member Hyacinth Yenni:

"I got involved with HART through what we called the United Parent Coalition (UPC). One of the school issues we talked about was ADAPT, a 3-6 after school program by the Board of Education that wasn't being run properly. We decided at one monthly meeting, wouldn't it be wonderful if we as parents could run a program in school?

Parent Kathy Evans:

"Gail Powell and I became co-chairs of UPC, and Diane Jones was secretary. Hyacinth, Dulcie Giadone, and Vern Tyler were also involved.

In late 1991 parents from eight south Hartford schools got together to discuss proposed funding for after school activities. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving expressed interest in supporting an effort to expand after-school enrichment activities. Parent Dulcie Giadone was instrumental in the early conversations with the Foundation's Michael Bangser. The group was armed with research on similar efforts from other cities by HART organizer Fernanda Berreiros. Evans: "We met with the Custodial Union, Parks and Recreation Department, principals and others in the school system. Fernanda coined the 'OPMAD' name. Dulcie got \$250,000 from the Hartford Foundation after a meeting with Michael Bangser

in the basement of McDonough School. I think he was impressed because we all wanted to share the money."

Evans:

"OPMAD for me began at Batchelder School. We had some money for programs, but we had to spend it or lose it. We threw together a quick after school program. It was very hard. Janitors and principals didn't always cooperate. Until Dulcie's meeting with the foundation, we had very little support to help out.

"Then we interviewed and hired Deb Zack as a consultant. We worked on by-laws for OPMAD all summer long (1992). That was a lot of work! Our parent steering committee included Tracy Jacobson, Dulcie Giadone, Fran Murphy, Gary Stoddard, Hyacinth Yenni, Susan Stoddard, and John McKenna. We had many of our meetings for by-laws at the home of Michelle Thomas.

Yenni:

"The idea of the parents running the program, being in charge — that was the exciting part, especially when many principals and teachers didn't want parents in the schools.

"We started in the schools where the parents were most involved. At South School, David Schultz and I went to our school principal and told him our idea. He thought it was great!

"After hiring an on-site coordinator to help parents oversee programs, we offered basketball, cooking, tutoring, arts and crafts, cheerleading and double -dutch jump rope. More than 250 of our 500 students participated in the first year! The kids loved it. I've never seen so many energetic kids want to do and do and do."

By the fall of 1992 more than 900 children were enrolled in OPMAD programs. On the heels of gang violence in 1993, OPMAD was among several groups supported with funding with Governor Lowell Weicker's "Youth Initiative" bill. McKenna: "We had a rally. OPMAD went to the Capitol. The Governor heard that there's a need, and that these people were willing to adjust the need, and he said, "What can I do?" The result of that was proposals that were written by HART and other neighborhood organizations, which were implemented in a piece of legislation called the "Governor's Initiative for Youth".

Success of OPMAD

Evans:

"OPMAD has been successful because there is a lot of ownership and belief in mission. The relationship between us all was so good, we worked out any kind of rough spots. We proved to principals that these were going to be good, lasting programs. Other parents liked the offerings. Got a lot of volunteers. And the benefit to parents were huge. We went into it at first because of after school activities for kids, but there were all these side benefits that came from it! Parents got involved in issues. This was first time parents ever talked to each other. It improved the relationship between parents and teachers — both understood the other

a lot more, in a positive environment.

"OPMAD is very important to the city of Hartford. It brings parents together in a city seen as so divided. No one can argue with the mission! Nothing else that compares to it in terms of parent learning and empowerment. Parents are the ones who run it, and that must never be lost."

Yenni:

"OPMAD has done a lot of good for Hartford children. Dr. Josiah Haig our former school superintendent told us that we had done the impossible!

"For the future, we will grow and get better. We have a lot of positive thinkers, and one clear goal: quality after school programs for our kids. We're in sixteen schools now, and want to be in all other schools soon." (In 1995, parents in New Britain, Connecticut created an organization based on the OPMAD model. The name: Organized Parents Make a Difference!).

McKenna:

"How many young people are we going to touch to actually get out of school and actually go to college? A lot. In the thousands are being touched. In the hundreds, parents are becoming involved. So I know we're impacting."

Young people from OPMAD celebrate at 1993 HART Congress.



Mi Casa

In 1990 members of HART's 'Anti-Drug Collaborative', including residents from several different neighborhoods as well as representatives from various city departments and non-profits, met to discuss approaches to drug and crime related prob-

lems. David Johnston of the Capitol Area Substance Abuse Council, Captain Joseph Croughwell of the Hartford Police Department, Rick Fisher of Hartford Hospital, Valentin Rosario of Hogar Crea, Leah Fichtner of the Hartford Public School System, Chris Merrow with the City's Office of Substance Abuse, and residents Hal Knowles, Peg Stewart, Jo Neiman, Gary Stoddard, and others were involved.

One issue that came up at these meetings (as well as at the HART Congress) was that of drug treatment services for area young people. After in-depth research, it was found that despite a tremendous neighborhood need there were no such services available for young people and their families, especially those with few resources. Also, it was learned that all Hartford teachers had recently received substance abuse training. The problem they were running into was that there was no place to send kids for help except to the criminal justice system!

The chairperson of the group at the time was Jack Eicholtzer. In the winter of 1991, meetings were held with Hartford Hospital, Institute of Living, Wheeler Clinic and others to try bringing these services to the community. After a series of sometimes heated meetings, the answer was, "No, we won't offer these services". Not wanting to give up, the group continued working to figure out how these needed services might be provided. A proposal was crafted by HART staff David Radcliffe with significant help from the schools' Leah Fichtner, Rick Fisher of Hartford Hospital and Chris Merrow with the City's Office of Substance Abuse. In the summer of 1991, Merrow secured \$100,000 and with it created 'Mi Casa', the first multicultural, neighborhood-based family service center for at-risk young people and their families. The first and current director of Mi Casa is Jorge Rivera.

Merrow:

"It's not simply lock people up and threw them away, but you have to deal with prevention and intervention, the linkages to drug use and drug treatment. You've got to explore them. So HART's response really became multipronged, dealing with both the criminal justice side of it and with the social and human service side of it, which was good. You really have to do both, and I think there was a recognition in the community."

Mi Casa and Young People Grow

On April 28th, 1992, HART held a rally at the State Capitol attended by over a 1000 people demanding that our state legislature support and pass an urban agenda for Hartford. This event took place one year after riots shook the people of Los Angeles. HART emphasized that without a thoughtful plan, Hartford could go the way of Los Angeles. To this point, the State did not have a plan to help rebuild our inner cities. This agenda would meet the growing needs of welfare reform, economic development, increased revenue for education, crime prevention, and more. [187]

In 1993, in the wake of severe gang violence, more than one hundred young people, their families, and other HART residents marched to the State Capitol to demand more support for young people. By the end of the year, this group had met with the Governor and other key policy leaders and State Departments! From this hard work grew a strong movement to push for a "Youth Initiative" to benefit young people and their families across the state.

After much work throughout the winter and spring on the part of HART's "Mi Casa", "OPMAD" (Organized Parents Make a Difference) and other important

youth programs from across Hartford, the State Legislature passed the \$10 million "Governor's Youth Initiative" in late May, 1993. With this major victory, more than \$300,000 was used to enhance and expand the much-needed work of Mi Casa and \$270,000 for OPMAD into many other Hartford schools and neighborhoods. [190] To celebrate this bill, Governor Lowell Weicker made an appearance at Mi Casa's Park Street office in September 1994.

In 1995, the State proposed severe funding cuts to both programs. After working with key state representatives and holding several rallies with more than 500 young people and their families, OPMAD and Mi Casa were able to restore most of their funding.

Success of Mi Casa and OPMAD

Boucher:

"Programs that just get developed through a good lap-top computer with someone's good idea are usually programs doomed to failure. But when there's genuine community support and genuine bottom-up kinds of strategies and approaches, I think these kind of programs show tremendous success. I think we've demonstrated that with OPMAD and Mi Casa.

"I think HART in the earlier day saw the issues that were out there, and just had to force itself and work real hard to kick down the door to get some attention and get some access from the city power players, to work on some of these issues. But as time went on, it wasn't just enough to be able to kick down the door and sit at the table and say, 'This is bad.' Or, 'That's bad.' Or, 'Here's a big, bad, sad problem over here.' What are you going to do about it? Often times we found that the people sitting at the table that were in charge of doing something about it — those power brokers — were pretty deficient in terms of any ideas and any resources, and in terms of any creativity that they had. They were very bankrupt when it came to providing solutions. And they have horrible track records, in terms of dealing with the issues that were out there.

Mi Casa youth take charge of their lives and futures. 1995 Earl Dotter photo.



So once we got the access, which HART was extremely successful in doing in its early history, then the question became, 'Now that we're at the table, what can we create?' [214]

Mi Casa and OPMAD Empower

"In HART's early years services were seen by many in the field as bad. It was thought if we ease people's pain through services it would limit their revolutionary fervor and desire for change."

— Mike Allison

Boucher:

"I think HART had no choice [to offer services]. Because if HART didn't do it, no one was going to do it, and there would be a significant gap out there that would have gone unattended if we had let some of the same deficient institutions out there continue to do a haphazard and mediocre job at it. I think that's the first reason for probably why we got into the service delivery. 'I think the second most important thing about it is that every quasi-service delivery thing that we do is based on empowerment models, period. There're a lot of people out there that use the word empowerment in a haphazard way. But empowerment to us is helping people gain access to the resources that they need to have a strong quality of life. I think when you look at the projects that we work on, in order to get a home, what do you have to do? You have to go to seven or eight workshops to learn how you, the individual, can build one's resources to get a house. If you don't come, you don't get a pre-qualification. We're saying, 'Do for yourself what you're capable of doing, and what you already have the potential to do, and we're just going to help structure it a bit so that you, yourself can go through a process to help yourself.' Now, is that delivering services? I don't think so. I think it's an empowerment. We're really critical about that. Also what do we do? We build the power of those people as a critical mass and say to the financial institutions, 'You need to reinvest in this community.' That's power. We're not sitting there at one hundred dollar dinners, thrown by non-profits that wine and dine bankers to feel sad for them and give out guilt money. We're helping people help themselves. We're insisting that financial institutions have a social responsibility to the community."

"Mi Casa didn't go up and kiss the government's cheek and say, 'Can we have three hundred thousand dollars to expand our program so that we can help the youth violence problems,' where kids fifteen years old are getting shot through the head because they've had no significant relationships to help them with their life. What do they do? They march. To go to the Governor, to get his attention, to be willing to sit down with them. They had dozens of meetings with lots of folks to push the issue. And after they won, they then had several parts of their service delivery system that is empowerment oriented. Parents have to be involved in the project. Young people have to be involved in several community events and activities from clean-ups to mural projects, to 'rights of passage' kinds of things. You know, they have regular community events down there, probably once every two months, where they average a couple hundred people. The place is packed. It's empowerment."

"Beyond the empowerment, the other key ingredient to these service delivery things is community building. And I think that's another significant part of HART's mission is community building. So how many other service delivery systems do you see build community? If anything, they do the reverse. They isolate the individual. They make the individual feel like the victim. They make the individual feel like a wasted by-product of society, right? But what we do is we help the person realize their potential. We help the person get involved in the process. We help the person build their confidence — self-esteem — to realize that gee whiz, there are resources out there, and that people do care, and caring is about relationships, and strengthening relationships are about community building. So you take the Mi Casa program, and you see significant community building going on."

"You take Organized Parents Make a Difference. The school system for years has been doing after-school programs, right? Supposedly. Supposedly for millions of dollars? Their after-school activities were structured such that the teacher would have to get time or time-and-a-half what they made to run programs for their own class? Between eight and three o'clock during the day they would take the kids on field trips to bowling alleys — to other places — using after-school enrichment money. And the teacher would get paid beyond their normal salary for that. What is the by-product? We insist that parents have to run the programs. To have a program, the parent has to be involved, at least a couple hours during the normal cycle. That it has to be done by a non-teacher. This is not a condemnation of teachers. There are some teachers that are doing some excellent stuff. But the idea is schools should be also who are the parents, who are the young people, what kind of interaction is there between the child and the parent? What kind of leadership skills are the kids gaining? What kind of leadership skills are the parents gaining? What kind of youth development is going on? What kind of parent development is going on?" [214]

In 1995, both Mi Casa and OPMAD are working to become non-profit organizations separate from HART.

Bond Money, In the Bag.

\$28 Million School Bond Referendum, 1988 — Sanchez/Burns/Kennelly Schools

"A bond is a certificate of ownership of a specified portion of a debt due to be paid by a government or corporation to an individual holder and usually bearing a fixed rate of interest."

— Random House College Dictionary

Getting a bond passed in Hartford is not easy. In 1986 an effort for \$4.5 million to build an addition onto Burns School failed to pass for the second time — by twenty three votes! To pass, a bond 'question' must receive 'yes' votes from 15% of the city's registered voters.

A coalition of parents, teachers, Chamber of Commerce and Democratic Town Committee, led by HART, pushed in the fall of 1988 for \$28 million in bond items. The state would pay for as much as 77% of the costs. This effort included:

- \$7 million for an addition and renovation to Kennelly School

Marguerite Sequin at Kennelly School:

"Don't let anyone tell you not to vote for this. This is a good bargain. If you went to K-Mart and everything was 77% off, do you think you would come out with your cart empty?"

- \$6 million for an addition onto Burns School

Burns was designed to accommodate 700 students and in 1988 had more than 1000 students. The school no longer had an art room or a music room because the space was needed for additional classes. The children ate prepackaged food at tables in a basement corridor because the school did not have a cafeteria or a full kitchen.

- \$15 million for a new elementary school at the former St. Anne's School at 176 Babcock Street (now the Maria Sanchez School). This would relieve some overcrowding at M.D. Fox, McDonough, Parkville, and Betances Schools.

To excite support for this major bond issue, literature explaining the bond issues in English and Spanish were sent home to all the parents. Voter registration tables were set up all over. Countless doors were knocked on, and thousands of phone calls were made. Juan Figueroa, who had a first grader at Burns, included bond information in his campaign literature in his run for State Representative in the 3rd District. Maria Sanchez who ran for State Representative in Clay Hill did the same. On election day, volunteers would talk with people as they went into the polls, encouraging their vote on the bond items. [146]

On November 9, 1988, all three questions received more than 13,000 votes each, well more than the 8,000 needed to pass.

\$28 Million School Bond, 1990 — new Moylan School

A coalition of school bond supporters worked for \$28 million more to relieve overcrowding at West Middle, Hooker and McDonough Schools, with up to 75% of the project reimbursable by the state. \$21 million of the project would build a new school behind the Moylan building on Hillside Avenue for 600 students. The cost for these two projects would add about \$630,000 a year for fifteen years to the city's debt service. The school system then paid \$690,000 to rent portable classrooms for these three schools. For a resident with a home with a market value of \$135,000, taxes would go up by about \$10.20 a year. Hooker had fourteen portable classrooms, McDonough twelve. [149]

Menatian:

"I was in charge of McDonough School, Behind the Rocks. I talked to the principal, Don Carso, at the school there, and he was telling me about how the kids had to study in the basement, and they had portables, and the walls were falling in. It was terrible. They had to have cold lunches. They had no real kitchen. And I was shocked. I had never seen that before. I'm like, 'This is bullshit. Why don't we get a new school.' He said, 'Well, I would love to.'

"Then I went over to see Richard Montañez, the principal at Mary Hooker Elementary School, and he's talking about how they had to have kids eat lunch from ten to one — in shifts, because the facility was too small. They had all these portable classrooms outside, and the cafeteria couldn't hold all the kids in one or two sessions, so they had to have a half dozen lunches. So you'd have kids who would eat at ten or ten-thirty and were starving by the time it was noon. And that effected their learning. And they didn't have a gym. They didn't have art or music. They had classes in the auditorium. It was ridiculous. And I was flabbergasted. And then Richard said to me, 'I'll work with you.' And this is the kind of person I like. 'But if I don't see a self-interest, I'm out of here. Don't even talk to me.' I said, 'Fair enough. What if I get your school and Hooker' — Hooker and McDonough together — 'to get a new school, that would alleviate all the crowding involved? Would you support that?' He said, 'Oh, yes. I'd be right there.'"

"Can you imagine a sardine can?" said William Newton of McDonough School. "I've got two kids in McDonough. It's very difficult for them to learn. We need to construct a new school."

Menatian:

"We got the schools together, we got the parents together and the teachers, and they agreed. And then we fought like hell — and this hadn't been done before, at least to my knowledge — where a grass roots effort — I hate that word, but — not that's it's not a good word, but it's misused all the time — was put together, where we went to the school board, and they agreed to put it on the November ballot. The school board had committee meetings and it was tough as hell, let me tell you, to get it on the ballot. It came from us. Because they would say, 'Well, what about the other schools, etc.' They kept using the excuse of, 'Other people need this.' Well, we told them to get organized. That's not our fault. Then we went to the City Council to put on the ballot, and they agreed."

"A lot of people said it wouldn't be approved. We also added on that Bulkeley got a new roof, Weaver got a new roof and a school in Asylum Hill got renovated. There was some definite city-wide attraction to voting on this. People were shocked." [207]

Big Bond: \$205 Million for schools and \$4 million for recreation center

"The big mother referendum."

— Ted Carroll

Recreation Center

In February 1992 a coalition of neighborhood residents began a campaign to press city officials to build a recreation center in the densely developed Frog Hollow. "We have the kids on the street. We're trying to get them out of the hands of drug dealers," said Nancy Galarza. About 150 people met with Mayor Perry and State

Representative Juan Figueroa to make their case. Officials said the idea is good, but finding the money will be the critical issue. [179]

The center would feature an indoor swimming pool, a basketball gym, classrooms, meeting rooms, etc. "This recreation center is an investment," said Nancy Galarza. Pupils at Burns School built models of what they would like the recreation center to look like. A fair where there were games for children and tables where residents could register to vote was held at Pope Park to gather support for the center. [180] To gain even wider support for the project, Galarza and other leaders negotiated to support the large school bond effort (detailed below) if those parent would endorse the recreation center. While support was lukewarm at first, HART engineered a massive effort where posters, flyers and other outreach produced the strongest campaign in recent history. Red and white signs urging support for both the recreation center and school bond items were more plentiful than campaign signs for candidates along Hartford streets. [183]

Funding for the recreation center was approved on November 3, 1992 by 12,644 to 5,600 votes. "I'm gonna stand there and dig that first shovel," said Galarza, mother of four, at the HART offices where volunteers warmed up after a cold day of standing at the polling places and tallying the election results. "Taking even a few kids off the streets, that recreation center will pay for itself," said Gary Stoddard, Parent Teacher Organization president at McDonough School. [181]

A groundbreaking ceremony took place in September 1994 with more than one hundred people, including parents, children and city and state officials. Resident and HART leader Jose Martinez chaired the ceremony. HART's Center City staff and organizer Edgar Villoroel especially provided tireless support to this remarkable fight.

\$205 million School Bond

A coalition called the World Class Education Committee started in August 1992 to push for passage of a bond referendum financing construction of or renovation of eight elementary and five middle Hartford schools over ten years. Key parent leaders included Dulcie Giadone, Kathy Evans, Gary Stoddard, David McKinley, and many others. The *Courant* said it will take a 'truly world class effort to convince voters to support the \$204.5 million plan in the middle of a recession.

With 26,000 students, Hartford in 1992 had the second largest public school system in New England. And, at the time, it was growing. At a cost of more than \$3 million a year, the school system leased more than one hundred portable classrooms across the city. McDonough students have to walk more than three blocks to gym at Moylan School. Parkville's sixteen portable classrooms would come down off the school's playground. [182]

The vote took place on a cold, rainy November 3, 1992. The results: 14,627 to 3,897.

Ted Carroll, resident and school board member described HART and the school bond efforts: "We won big-time (on the school bond issue). It was about a 4-1 vote, in favor of that authorization, and far more votes than we needed for approval, and far more votes than other questions got that year. In fact, some of the other questions that were on the ballot were defeated because they lacked the kind of support which the school bond questions generated. And which, again, HART was instrumental in galvanizing. [195]

Taxes

Property Tax Re-evaluation: 1987/1988

Haunted by the memory of whopping tax increases after the 1978 property revaluation, city residents wanted to get together to prevent the same thing from happening again. More than 300 people packed St. Lawrence O'Toole Church in April 1987 to meet with City Manager Alfred Gatta and demand fair treatment for the state-mandated 1988 reval. HART sought assurances that the same assessment method, called comparable sales, be used for both residential and commercial properties. [136] Comparable sales uses the sale of similar property in the same general location to determine property values.

Hartford residents' fear of tax hike was understandable. At the time they paid the highest taxes in the state - just under \$73 per \$1,000 of property value. Meanwhile the city's twelve closest neighbors had rates ranging from just over \$18 per \$1000 in Farmington to about \$50 in Glastonbury. [136]

In September 1987 more than 250 people jammed into the council chambers and spilled over into the hallway making so much noise that police sealed off the chambers, leaving at least one hundred people beyond the heavy metal doors. The City Council rejected HART's resolution to use comparable sales approach to assessment. Keith Hunt, Flora Long, and Jackie Fongemie were among the leaders. Fongemie's speech before the council degenerated into a shouting match with Deputy Mayor Al Marotta. [137]

Fongemie:

"We went and we jammed the Council chambers and Thirman Milner was mayor then. We're all chanting and he was warning us to be quiet or else he'd call the police. This is how afraid they were. You'd think they'd be expecting a riot. So at last he got the cops, some inside and some outside. He kept wanting me to be quiet, so at one point I'm yelling at him and he's yelling at me and he's telling me to be quiet. So I'm daring him to throw us out. I had my hand at him and we're just yelling at each other. Flora Long was in back of me and we're all kind of yelling at once. So the cops kind of straightened themselves out and I thought this was my time to leave the Chamber before we get thrown. So I said, 'Fine, We'll leave.' The *Courant* had it that I stomped out of Council Chamber and 200 people followed me."

In October the City Council passed a resolution that authorized the appraisal firm hired by the City to use 'comparable sales' wherever applicable in evaluating the value of commercial property. Councilman Allan Taylor said the victory was 'totally hollow in terms of bottom line results.' HART leadership believed that if the economy had continued to blossom as it was at the time, this change in assessment methods would have been effective in reducing tax burden for homeowners.

Push for Tax Relief: 1.5% Property Tax Cap (1989)

"The 1.5% cap was and still is one of the best resident protection for real property in the United States."

— John McKenna, taxpayer

Footprints: Jackie Fongemie

"I first heard of HART when my brother, Lee Fongemie, was [HART] president and he used to try to talk me into going to the neighborhood meetings. I was one of those people that said, 'No, that's all right.' I lived on Glendale Avenue. He used a flyer and he'd tell me about it and I was one of those people who would say, 'No, you go. What's one more person? I'm not going to go.' Then I got really interested when the Newfield Avenue Bridge closed because I used to go that way all the time, so that was an inconvenience for me.

"I got involved. I was talked into being a co-chair and I didn't know the first thing about running meetings. Stupid me, but it was all very overwhelming because it was all new to me and foreign to me, seeing all these politicians that I used to think were like Gods and then to find out they're not like that.

"You need to be involved. I think where I've grown is that when my brother used to ask me to go to meetings and I'd say, 'No, you'll take care of things for me.' I didn't like it when I found people telling me that, and I'd complain, but I wasn't willing to do anything about it. I found out how important it is to be involved, to care, to take an interest in what happens on the next street or in Charter Oak Terrace.

"There's something very wonderful about HART. It draws people. The people are very special that are on the board. The people that I liked on the board, the people that are committed to being on the board, to come out to meetings, and they're very unselfish. They give of themselves and they don't question. It's kind of a unique type of little family, I think. So as long as I'm going to be living in Hartford, I'm going to be involved in HART because you have to be. I can't afford not to be."

"I think it probably saved Hartford, the 1.5% tax cap."

— Professor Richard Pomp, UCONN Law School

John McKenna:

"My earliest involvement in HART occurred one day within a month after moving into the house I live in now on 292 Victoria Road. I was mowing the lawn. A representative from HART said, 'Could I have a moment of your time?' I talked to him and he said, 'What would you say if I told you that your taxes are going to go up a hundred dollars a month.' I said, 'Please don't. I just moved in here to get away from that from my landlord.' He said, 'Can we talk about it?' I said, 'Sure.' Well, that was the beginning of my involvement with HART because at the time, it was just before the property revaluation in 1989."

What is the 1.5% Tax Cap?

McKenna:

"The 1.5 percent cap basically said that because surrounding communities were paying approximately 1.3 percent of the market value of their

home in taxes, we said, 'Okay, we'll even spend a little more than that. We'll spend 1.5 percent, but that will be the most. We'll cap Hartford resident tax payers with that amount.' Senator DiBella and our Tax Assessor, Bob Hartzell from Hartford, were the major contributors behind influencing the legislators into passing this legislation."

State Senator William DiBella:

"It (the 1.5 cap) was my idea. I'll tell you that. [laughs] There's no doubt about that one. [laughs] I really stumped them all, sitting up here one day, kicking the thing around. [City Tax Assessor Robert Hartzell: "I woke at 4 a.m. one morning with the 1.5% cap idea and said, 'Ah ha!'""]

"That year, I was playing in a golf tournament, and really wanted to have a special session to consider the cap. Tom Ritter was the Speaker of the House, and he was negotiating with Governor O'Neill, who didn't want the 1.5 cap bill. He kept saying to O'Neill, 'I'm not good in confrontations. Hey, I'm your friend. Imagine if you were dealing with DiBella, you wouldn't get anything!' O'Neill would rather eat nails than deal with me.

"Finally O'Neill made a compromise, and if you look at the bill there were two things added. The first one was that there had to be a productivity study on city government. Piece of cake. The second issue was he wanted a cap of residential properties at \$270,000. If you had residential property in the 270 range, so that the West End people would not get rich. O'Neill thought he was wacking me, but on Fairfield

Avenue, my house is only \$250,000. [laughs] So it wasn't affecting me. He thought he was zinging me and Ritter, and Ritter's house was, I think, 250 also. In those days you had some rather expensive houses in the West End. So he zapped the West End. But that was a compromise. We knew we had to put a cap on it. Anything above that, they would not have a break.

"We passed the bill after the House session got called in. I remember I was playing golf at the Scarsdale Country Club. I had a portable phone and I was talking to Ritter. I said, 'Tell him (O'Neill) no.' O'Neill is ready to tear the place apart. He couldn't find me. [laughs] So finally Ritter came back to the phone and said, 'We've gotta go on this now.' And we had the Speaker

Footprints: John McKenna

McKenna: "Hartford has been going downhill. Including the communities that HART services. My feeling is that we'd be going down hill a hell of a lot faster without HART. And the impact would be tremendous escalation in violence, more abandonment of property, reduction in residential owners, and increased plight of the middle class."

"HART will continue to be a positive community influence and the community will feel more empowerment due to HART. I don't see other organizations that are going out to the degree HART does, to try to build the strength of the residents in the community, so that they know that they can make a difference." [200]

and everybody waiting to go into session. I'm holding the Legislature up. We were holding it up, holding it up, holding it up. Finally O'Neill agreed, and they started the Session, and passed the bill."

Hartzell:

"The big club that was used in getting this passed by Senator DiBella was the threat of another piece of legislation that would allow the taxation of computer software. So he [DiBella] kind of gave that up. The legislature gave up taxing computer software and we got the 1.5% cap."

Dibella:

"HART was great. They came up here and lobbied people. They got a little over zealous. [laughs] We had to calm them down. They were up here, calling O'Neill and them dirt bags. 'Calm down,' I said. 'We're going to have to go back to this guy.' I'll never forget we were downstairs trying to control the people. We had busloads of people coming up. That was one bill I really gained a lot of respect for HART on, because it was such a difficult bill. They wanted to beat everybody up! That's the biggest bill we've passed since I've been in government. Without that, tax bills would have gone up more than 200% or more!" [213]

Impact of 1.5% Cap on Other Properties

Timothy Moynihan, President of Greater Hartford Chamber of Commerce:

"We opposed the 1.5 cap. We said that that would ultimately be counterproductive. That it would lead to abandonment of apartment houses. It would jack up the property taxes on apartment houses. And it would make the city less competitive, in terms of the suburbs, in terms of office space. I believe we were proven right on all accounts. HART used to think that there was a way that you could benefit homeowners and not effect the other classes of business. Well, that's not how it works. And so apartment dwellers, who are less capable of paying, and businesses who can move anywhere they want to these days, and they're proving that — were made to pay extra, and are still paying extra." [232]

Footprints: Timothy Moynihan, Chamber of Commerce

Moynihan: "HART would invite you to organizations where everything had to be a "yes" or "no" answer, and they'd chant and scream and picket. And if you said the wrong thing, they'd all boo and hold a letter up behind your back, saying that you were some kind of a less desirable person, and maybe try to orchestrate completely public sessions."

"If you and I are agreeing on an issue and working together, why should we be different because we happen to disagree and are working apart? Because next week we're agreeing and working together. You learn that in the dynamics of a legislative process. Your allies today are your enemies tomorrow. And sometimes in the same day."

McKenna:

"Residents fall into two categories. Homeowners and apartment dwellers. Well, the homeowners didn't want to get a tax break at the expense of the apartment dwellers, so what the homeowners said was, 'We'll take the 1.5 percent cap. In addition to that, whatever additional taxes that the 1.5 percent put on the apartment owners' tax bills — we'll also pay those.' So there was no increase in taxes from the 1.5 percent cap on apartment dwellers. The apartment dwellers didn't get impacted at all because their share that went into the pot that paid the 1.5 percent pot — we, the homeowners said, 'We will pay that.' When apartment owners say the cap is hurting them, it's all smoke that they bring up. They're clouding the issue, and if you ask them directly, they'll tell you the honest answer. All they're doing is trying to stir the pot up."

In 1989 the State Senate passed an amendment to the tax relief bill which exempted apartment buildings from the surcharge (to help pay for the plan) under the 1.5 percent cap. City Tax Assessor Robert Hartzell: "So the 1.5% cap came to be essentially a 1.63% cap because of the non-surcharge on the apartments. . . apartment owners are taxed at the same rate as homeowners. It's not the 1.5 that's killing them. What happened is there was a revaluation done in '89. The apartment values peaked about late 1989. So they're being assessed at the very peak of value, but so is everybody else."

McKenna:

"And so in effect, all residents were positively impacted by the 1.5 percent legislation. Commercial and homeowners were the only ones that contributed to the 1.5 percent pool. The four units and above contributed zero. So the biggest burden went to the commercial interest in Hartford, which included large and small businesses."

"The only question was, how much tax relief would there be, because just looking at economics, nobody would ever move into Hartford if they had to pay fifty percent more on taxes than the town right next door. And I knew something was going to have to be done. I'm very happy about the cap. We have to make sure it never gets taken off the books or played with." [200]

Use the 1.5% Tax Cap/Push for a 1990 Revaluation

Property taxes are based on something called the mill rate. One mill equals \$1 of tax on \$1000 worth of property. Hartford's mill rate in 1990 was the second highest in the state at 72.9. After revaluation, the mill rate lowered to about 34 mills, but higher property values resulted in major tax increases.

The 1.5% cap plan, which would tax the average house in Hartford at 1.5 percent of its market value (the price of your house if put on the market), is the best plan for most homeowners. With this newly passed state legislation, the City would decide whether or not to authorize use of the 1.5 cap. In May 1990, HART pushed for the council to pass the 1.5 cap.

In 1990, the owner of a typical house whose newly assessed market value was \$140,000 would owe about \$3,400 in taxes — nearly double the prior year's bill.

Footprints: Professor Richard Pomp, University of Connecticut Law School

HART's Tax Committee has received invaluable guidance and understanding of tax law and calculations from Professor Pomp. Many a pizza have been consumed over numerous meetings while leaders toiled away, figuring and refiguring the impact of a variety of tax issues, including the impact of revaluations and of the 1.5% cap.

Pomp:

"I started working with HART about fifteen years ago. It was during one of the many property tax crisis in the city and someone called from HART and asked if I would meet with them to talk about taxes. My first response was really, 'No, I've had too many bad experiences with civic groups, people who know nothing, aren't willing to work hard at learning anything,' and so I'm always very leery.

"But I did go to this meeting, and it was quite clear to me that I was dealing with a group of colleagues, rather than just a group of do-gooders who knew nothing and weren't going to work hard. It was a very impressive group and has remained so. I think it's the most knowledgeable of any civic group I've ever worked with. . . It's really just very rewarding for me - exceptional.

"One of the things I'm upset about is that these ding-bat part-time real estate agents don't even understand the 1.5% tax. So when they're out hustling houses in Hartford, what they should be parading forth is this great feature of living in the city that they don't even mention. That is just inexcusable to me, that people in this profession don't even know about the cap."

This amount is without the 1.5% cap. The actual bill, with the 1.5% cap, would be \$2,300, which was still a 30% increase. Tax relief from the 1.5% cap would not begin until October, so the first quarter bill reflected an amount that was really double of what it should have been. [167]

HART held a tax protest at city hall in July 1990. People had just received new bills that reflected taxes for the full, unabated, non 1.5 tax cap increase resulting from revaluing residential property for the first time in ten years.

Hartzell:

"[There was a meeting] at St. Lawrence O'Toole's Church, about 400-500 people. It got a little antsy and some people were a little bit out of line, and somebody [a resident] reacted. The tax collector at the time was not a real experienced public speaker and had to deal with some of these things and it got a little unruly. Inez Pegease [HART President] and the person who was getting out of control had a confrontation.

"I'm not quite sure exactly what happened. All I know is I was sitting on the stage and there were like five or six of us sitting there. I turned around and everybody that was in my group was gone out the door. [laughs] And I was just standing there alone, looking like, 'Well?'

I've been in large gatherings and had people get out of control and you can handle them, but if you're not experienced in those things, you don't know how to do it. I didn't have to do anything because she'd done it."

Boucher:

"This was the closest thing to a slugfest that I've ever seen. This guy goes up to Inez and tries to grab the microphone. She won't let go, and kicks him in the shins! The whole place erupts, and thirty people are now up front in the face of the officials, yelling and pointing fingers in their faces. It was chaos!"

Hartzell:

"It got back under control and then the problem essentially was the people wanted to know answers to how things were going to be handled. In the end it worked out, the confusion ended and the people understood what was going to happen and by the second bill. We called a lot of the banks. What we did is we took a very aggressive stance and the tax collector, I think, did a very good job. They sent out letters to the banks and mortgage companies and told them what was happening, what your figures really would be under the new scenarios and we eventually got it straightened out. But it was pretty messed up."

By August 1990 there were still some outstanding issues over the 1.5 cap and recent tax bills. HART held "The Hartford Tea Party" protest at City Hall. An old man wearing a three-cornered hat clutched a red, white and blue box of tea bags. Others among the 1000 strong carried signs that read 'Ax the Tax'. The rally was close to a riot. Police tried to close the doors to the Council chambers. "Hey, they're closing the doors," 130 people yelled. "Those are taxpayers out there! Keep 'em open!"

Councilwoman Marie Kirkley-Bey banged the gavel and told the police to keep the door open, but the people drowned out the gavel, and the public address system. Police left the doors open. Demands that were agreed to included conducting an immediate revaluation (see below), a hiring freeze of city employees (agreed to, but some snuck in under the freeze), and implementation of the new 1.5 cap bill. [168]

Freeze or Move Forward on Property Tax Revaluation?

Shortly after the 1990 tax assessment and the arrival of the new tax bills the real estate market turned down and there was a sense of unfairness that homeowners were now stuck with huge valuations that bore no relation to current market conditions. HART's Tax Committee went to the Council and asked for a special interim revaluation to be conducted which would reflect the newly fallen values of homes. The largely new city council elected in 1991 began the process for a new assessment. But, "we discovered that while residential property values had fallen," wrote resident James Hanley, "commercial property had virtually collapsed. The speculator's party was over, and the banks wanted to be paid, except, alas, they were at the party too." This meant that an 'interim reval' held in 1992 would really cause a major increase on taxes for one, two and three family homes. [178]

Carrie Saxon Perry:

"After the 1991 elections HART reversed and said that the revaluation

would be not so much in the residents' best interest. But they did research, and they did come down constantly and testified very responsibly about the whole tax issue. This definitely made a big difference. That's when the research and the facts were very important in terms of information for the Council and myself — it was very helpful."

In February 1992 HART now demanded that the city postpone the planned property revaluation. If the revaluation had been done that year, homes in the city would be worth less but would be taxed at a higher rate because the values of commercial and industrial properties would have dropped at a far greater rate than homes. Without city budget cuts there would still be a need for the same amount of revenue, so taxes would shift to the property class with the lowest decline: homes. "The residents can't take another increase [as happened with the 1989 revaluation]. We've had enough. Show us you care about people who live here," said Dulcie Giadone. [177]

HART helped turn the fence-sitting Council in part because of Nick Carbone, who irritated the Council by pushing for the revaluation because he personally stood to save a great deal of money. HART prevented the property revaluation from happening that year, saving homeowners an average of \$400.

Property Tax Revaluation/Keep the 1.5% Tax Cap: Budget 1994

HART's Tax Committee developed the following 'tax and budget' plan for 1994:

- change the state spending cap that exempts federal aid that may come to Hartford
- change PILOT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes) definition to include reimbursement to Hartford for public housing units
- promote tax exemption on data processing equipment
- 100% full funding of General Assistance, as well as a state 'takeover' of General Assistance administration
- full funding of the 'Educational Enhancement Act' for city schools
- freeze the upcoming property revaluation, and study a state-wide property assessment system
- make sure the 1.5% tax cap is kept!

Support of these items at the state would have filled much of the city's budget gap, prevent loss of services, and maintain the crucial 1.5% tax cap that saves over \$1000 a year for the average homeowner.

One element of this budget plan included property taxes. In spring 1994, HART leaders researched the possible impact of the scheduled property revaluation. This digging around revealed some shocking figures: with a revaluation, the average homeowner would see a \$200 tax increase in 1995 and 1996; and taxes on cars would go up by at least 60%.

As this work went on, the State of Connecticut passed new legislation in May that would allow towns like Hartford to "freeze" (postpone) their property revalu-

ations for two years until the state could come up with a better method of property assessment. With this important law in hand, residents met with City Council Majority Leader John O'Connell and asked him to introduce a resolution to freeze the revaluation.

On Monday, June 13, 1994, the City Council and Mayor passed the resolution by a 9-0 vote, despite some last minute efforts to table the item. [190]

Since 1978 HART has shown extraordinary success at researching, creating a sophisticated strategy and involving large numbers of residents in tax and budget-related issues. This aggressive approach has resulted in numerous public policy changes, saving Hartford residents tens of millions of dollars.



**HART and the Grim Reaper rally
In 1993 at City Hall to fight
loss of crucial city services,
and the possible death of our
neighborhoods.**



Today and Tomorrow

"The thing is, you always make mistakes. Make new ones, you know?
[laughs]

-- Former Hartford Mayor Carrie Saxon Perry

Elements of Success

"If HART is affecting the community, that's a great thing. If it's just becoming an organization, then that's not so great. Because to me, one of the problems I see in community organizations is instead of doing what they set out to do, they just begin perpetuating organizations without really serving a purpose."

— Renee Martin

Of the many community organizations that sprung to life in the 1970's, HART is the oldest in New England and one of the longest-lasting in the country. More important than its longevity, HART has been effective. The primary reasons HART has successfully survived are its stable funding, quality leadership, staffing, and an organizational focus that trains residents to use thoughtful strategy to stimulate focused action on specific community issues.

Funding

It is difficult to maintain a lasting organization without stable funding, even if the group is focused on its central mission of organizing and has a quality cadre of resident leadership and staff. Many HART-type groups in the early 1980's did not survive sharp federal funding cutbacks. Other groups have relied on single funding sources, while some have gathered whatever funding is available, even if that money supports an effort outside of the organization's original mission. HART has had great success with its funding, enabling the organization to stay true to the core objective of organizing residents to build neighborhood power.

After owing its early existence to the Campaign for Human Development (CHD), HART approached the United Way in 1980 to support community organizing. CHD funding lasted only three years, and if HART was to realize long-term organizational development, a stable funding source was necessary.

Accessing the United Way was no easy task, as that organization was seen as a rather conservative grant-giving operation. Many other community groups around the country had tried for United Way support, only to have the door firmly shut in their faces. HART's experience had a more positive outcome.

Footprints: Astrida Olds

Olds:

"I went to work as a corporate fund director at Connecticut Mutual in '81.

"The whole HART approach was much more confrontive and challenging of the establishment in the early 1980's. So, among my colleagues and corporate funding decision makers, many expressed informal comments like, 'Oh, we found HART knocking on our door to come and request money.' So it was quite shocking to many of them that the United Way had admitted HART to a United Way member agency for a grant in 1980.

"What we (Connecticut Mutual) funded – and I remember we were quite nervous the first time we had to present this to our senior vice president – we provided funding for an anti-arson program. That's what HART needed money for, and it was, we felt, a very, very good program – the whole purpose of it was people in the neighborhood on their blocks were recruited to pay special attention to what goes on in abandoned buildings.

"I served on the United Way allocations committee and was able to be a bridge between the United Way sub-committee that I was part of and HART. Now, mind you, these would all be volunteers at the United Way, typically working for corporations in the area, living out of town – a life that's very different from the HART neighborhoods. They couldn't understand. What is wrong with HART? Why are they doing this? Why are they making people angry? It was hard for them to really understand the whole concept of community organizing. Today, HART is no longer thought of as something you whisper about." [219]

Throughout the 1980's the United Way provided almost 50% of HART's budget. In later years HART diversified its budget by encouraging support from residents and area business through 'ad book' and 'supporter drive' fundraising campaigns. HART was also able to garner financial support from smaller foundations and corporations in the early to mid-1980's.

In the late 1980's and early 1990's HART found support through several other sources. Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds were secured for HART's home ownership and jobs programs, and more recently for the 'CHARGE' housing initiative described later in this chapter. Also in the late 1980's, HART procured funding through the Department of Justice, in affiliation with the National Training and Information Center. This grant lasted for six years and helped leverage smaller grants from the Fisher Foundation, the Hartford Courant Foundation, the Jewish Fund for Justice, and others.

In 1990, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving funded HART and provided major grants to support a range of organizing activities. This support included the start-up of the now wildly successful "Organized Parents Make a Difference", an after-school enrichment program in a dozen Hartford schools.

In the early 1990's, HART attracted significant State funds through the Drug Enforcement Program and later through the Safe Neighborhood program. HART presently is working with a city-wide \$2.2 million Department of Justice effort

called the Comprehensive Community Partnership (CCP). A major goal of CCP is to replicate the government-community partnership model that has developed in the Frog Hollow neighborhood. It is planned to incorporate some CCP funding into neighborhood organizing budgets.

While HART has become more dependent on public sector funds, it has not jeopardized neighborhood positions. HART has not backed off issues as a result of public officials holding funds as ransom to win HART's consent. City Councilman Eugenio Caro:

"Today, as a politician, what I would like [people to know] is that I've been there always for issues that HART has always wanted. I've tried my best to be there, because I think regardless of my differences in terms of how you go about -- the fact of the matter, [HART does] have some good effects, and it provides some services for some people. But because now HART receives money from us [City of Hartford], I don't think it's fair that when we say here's the money, you still come around and beat the hell out of us."

Staff

Although the role of HART's paid staff is to not be public and 'up-front', the history of HART and other similar organizations has shown that quality staff are a key component to that organization's success at involving leaders and moving forward on specific community issues. Recruiting and maintaining a diverse, experienced staff with increasingly competitive salaries and benefits has made community organizing more of a profession now than anytime in the past. HART also provides staff training through UCAN and other consultants. These efforts have contributed to increased effectiveness as well as greater staff longevity and organizational stability.

Leadership

Volunteer residents provide the leadership that move community issues forward. HART leaders come from everyday walks of life, not always with much experience in negotiating with private and public officials. Experiences of running meetings provides a very real, and sometimes challenging, training ground for residents.

Footprints: Chris Merrow offers his views on 1995 HART leadership

Merrow:

"To a very great extent what happens in an organization in the city as in any hierarchy is a function of personality and a function of leadership. I think the HART Director, Jim Boucher, is one of the biggest assets we have in the city. He has been for the last seven or eight years. I don't work for him—he's probably hell to work for, but seeing him outside, he's a mediator. He just checks his ego at the door and exemplifies what a director of a community based organization should be. We've seen it in the past where the organization becomes a political extension of the director's ambition, and that's never happened with HART. [Boucher stays] in the background. He's a coalition builder. He's a consensus builder and yet he manages to be aggressive and assertive."

Alta Lash points to the need for deliberate strategies for leadership development: "The best advice I would give HART now? Leadership development. That organizing is a priority. Getting people together. Showing people how to run meetings, hold meetings, make decisions, figure out how to get from point A to point B, and that that should not be restricted to just a handful of people. We need to continue showing that any person living on whatever street can do that."

David Abdow, organizer with HART in the mid-1980's supports Lash:

"To me the essence of any organizing effort is the ability to continuously broaden your organizing and leadership base. In fact, to me, that's the essence of any organization, is it's ability to do that, whether it's a business or non-profit. But success comes from the ability to recruit, organize, and train new leadership for the organization."

"It becomes more of a challenge to insure that you're staying on the agenda of leadership development as opposed to just fixing problem after problem. It's easy to go and do one-shot deals, but the challenge is to develop leaders and groups in such a way that they sustain themselves."

"What goes first, the chicken or the egg? Sometimes you go after issues to build your leadership base, and sometimes you can't take on issues unless you've got a real good leadership base. So, it's a circular thing. I think you jump in anywhere along the circle to build your organization. I think the heart and soul of organizing is the strength and depth of your leadership."

Former HART Presidents Dulcie Giadone and Vicky Raczka expressed the need to be well-equipped with public life, often in the face of adversarial public officials. Giadone:

"My worst experience was early on in HART. What happened was that I was just starting to run meetings. This really taught me a lesson of how politicians are because I didn't realize at that time I had kind of an idealistic view of politicians. I thought they really wanted to listen to the community. I thought they really wanted to do good for the community, and that they would be respectful. Well, I learned early on in this meeting they did none of these things." [211]

Raczka:

"I go back and talk to people who have gone through being really active in HART, and no one will ever watch news or read a newspaper the same way again. That's something you always take with you. You got to think of yourself as someone who could make a difference -- someone who can affect the news, not just read about it. I think anyone who's gone through a few of these meetings, and gone down to City Hall and demonstrated feels that. That's a great thing to take with you forever. Yes, I'll bet you won't find anyone who's gone through those things who wouldn't agree with that." [220]

Sometimes leadership development and training is met with mixed signals from public officials. Mayor Mike Peters:

"I'll never forget [this meeting with HART]. I had just gotten on the Redevelopment Agency, and we were meeting over at the church on Zion

Street. Vicky Raczka was in there and she had the microphone. I guess at that time the rule was you never give up the microphone if you're the president of HART. I got up to speak and she had asked me a question. I went to grab the mike thinking I could use it to address the audience. We were both pulling on it. She wouldn't let go and I wouldn't let go. Then she told me that I didn't understand that she had to hold the mike because that's the way it went. Certainly, I gave her the mike, but it was pretty funny.

"I think it's [HART] been a good impact. If I go back ten or eight years ago, at the time, I didn't really have the confidence in HART that I have right now. I think now it's been a much bigger impact, a much more positive impact because of the ability to work together with everybody. It's good to have HART as part of that decision making process."

Focus

The approach to organizing is based on a simple premise: talk with people, and work on what's important to them. Fr. David McDonald:

"HART has gone so far beyond my expectations. You know, I honestly didn't know what would happen, but if it in fact works, and I think it did, neighborhood organizations have now grown throughout the city, and became a model for others in other cities. The focus of talking neighbor-to-neighbor is really the strength of HART, and let's hope that is never lost."

Since its inception, HART has worked hard to develop a process of maximizing community input on those issues most important to the most people. This effort is made without becoming paralyzed by trying to be all things to everybody. Jim Boucher:

"We have to prioritize what issue we work on because otherwise we'd be all over the place. And then we're not going to be successful at anything. So we have to be successful at what the community tells us is most important, and then go from there. We gauge that at the annual 'Community Congress'. We try to say, 'These are the several priorities the community says are important,' and we really try our best -- we're not always successful, but do our best to stay with those issues."

"The failure in a lot of community organizations is that they probably spend over fifty percent of their time worrying and fretting and concerning themselves about their 'internal' problems. These internal problems leads the director to spend time mediating this and mediating that, and not taking action on the external issues of the organization." [214]

HART's success has come from the ability to maintain focus on external issues as determined by a continual process of community input. Monthly meetings in each neighborhood assures that there is follow-up on existing issues and room for new issues that arise.

School board member Ted Carroll:

"I think the groups that have suffered, and those that have died or have remained stagnant. Ones that have stayed limited in their approach to

problems. And I don't think that anyone would describe HART as being stagnant. I think it has been a dynamic organization, and I think as the needs change, and as the conditions change, and the circumstances change, I think HART will continue to evolve." [195]

David Beckwith has observed HART for much of our first twenty years:

"Certainly you (HART) have more power today. The whole idea was to work on issues, get things done, and get them done in a way that builds power, rather than just using it up. You have avoided a lot of the problems that older organizations have. Or you've been through them. You've avoided selling out to the funders. Most organizations hit a wall where they can't figure out where their next dollar is going to come from, and will take money that requires them to do things they don't want to do, or to be things they don't want to be. HART hasn't done that. You've stayed true to the central focus of organizing. You built whatever else you do on that central focus, rather than letting the other tails wag that dog. And that's a powerful testimony to the clarity of vision about what the central job of HART is. [203]

"I don't know what the issues will be, but I know you'll be fighting and delivering, all the way down. HART has never been afraid to be effective. And I mean that sincerely. Many organizations think that all that's important is to be right. And that's fine. Many organizations think that all that's important is to stay busy, so they take a little grant, they fix a couple houses, they make a little meeting, they have a little program, and several people come to the thing, and they get job training, and whether they get jobs or not -- we don't really care. HART is always number one, being concerned about actually having an important impact, and number two, you have not been afraid to actually deliver. That's not common. But it's really important. And so I think you will continue to deliver tangible benefits to the people you are organizing."

"I don't know who the next wave of immigrants is going to be. I don't know what the next wave of problems is going to be. I don't know what the economics of the region are going to do to this area. I don't know what the dynamics of the state, city, and regional politics are going to do. What I do know is in the HART turf, you're not going to be the victims of all those things. You're going to be grabbing them by the throat. And whatever happens, (a) it won't be as bad as it would be if you weren't there; and (b) people will get actual, tangible benefits of fighting and winning." [203]

In choosing issues, some public officials believe that HART could be even more aggressive. Councilman John O'Connell:

"I think if there were some weaknesses in HART it's that in a way it should be more confrontational. I think with politicians there's much too much courtesy and deference. My attitude is that we all asked for the job. You ask a tough question when you need to ask them. I think HART's much more mellow today." [227]

New Frontiers

"The way children are growing up in today's society, they're fearless. The lack of employment, the movies that they watch, the type of life that they have out there on the streets, the type of education that they don't receive right now . . . we must keep fighting."

— Ramonita Ortiz, former HART leader and organizer

"A lot of the people who live here are here because we want to be, not because we have to be. Our message is clear that the neighborhood people are the power, the control."

— Peg Stewart, 1995 HART President

Faced with the political volatility and an increased skepticism for government as a result of Mayor Perry's tenure, voters in 1994 turned to candidates who presented themselves as more moderate. Two Democratic councilmembers teamed with three Republicans and followed the leadership of Mayor Mike Peters to City Hall. Their platform included decreasing the tax burden, cutting expenses, freezing human service programs, and reaching out to both the corporate and community sectors. Community issues and partnerships have received a warm welcome from the new city leadership. While some tensions exist, new partnerships have emerged that will surely impact the future of Hartford and HART. Dulcie Giadone:

"With our successes, I've seen HART grow into all these block watches and revitalization areas, and that's because people are hopeful. And I think HART has really built on that, and I think the politicians and the City officials and departments know that. They won't tell us, but they know. And when I go to a meeting now, I see all those officials there and department heads, I know they really respect HART. And they want us to stay. They won't tell us, and they give us a hard time, but I really think HART has had a big impact. We're a model for the other community organizations. I think that they are now looking to what we do." [211]

David Martinez:

"HART has been able to organize and go to the city and say, 'This is what we want as a neighborhood. This is what we need.' And now the City comes to HART when they need things. I think that's a big plus." [234]

It is likely that a number of the neighborhood issues that defined HART's first twenty years will pepper the days to come, including public safety, delivery of city services, blight, home ownership, youth alternatives, property taxes and many others. It is also certain that HART will address other, emerging concerns that may not have gotten the sustained imagination and attention needed to date. HART today has put new energy into key local issues involving two primary areas: housing, and what is often called 'economic development'.

Economic Development

HART is no stranger to development issues. Fights for jobs and training,

linkages to a once booming downtown, creation of Broad Park Development and numerous other initiatives highlight HART's history.

Employment: training, placement and creation

"Make more jobs. That's the only way we will carry people. By getting somebody a job, that person will be off the streets. I think Hartford is going to make it. I have high hopes for Hartford. But the only way that we're going to do better in Hartford is by having jobs available for people."

[194]

—HART staff Ana Natal

In 1994, HART leadership observed that existing job training programs were not meeting the needs of residents. There were very few organizations doing a good job of training and placement, and those that were could not meet the demand. To test the interest in training, HART held a 'Job Fair' to sign people up for training. The City's Employment Resource Development Agency said no one would come, that people wanted jobs and not training. After 500 people filed through the cramped HART office, it was clear that people wanted to do whatever it took to gain the skills needed for meaningful employment. HART soon created a 'Jobs Club' to assist neighborhood residents with training and employment needs.

The philosophy behind the Jobs Club is that finding a job is a full-time job. Besides gathering the necessary support and encouragement from other unemployed persons, the club provides classes to those looking for employment. Classes are conducted with support from the State Department of Labor (DOL) and the Connecticut Puerto Rican Forum and consist of: interviewing, resume writing, networking and other relevant skills. The Club also works with the Department of Labor to provide numerous workshops, training and counseling for individuals involved in a job search. Prospective employers are given the opportunity to meet with Club members to help find job openings. The State Department of Labor estimates that 90% of all jobs come through job networking, referral and adequate job hunting preparation. The HART Jobs Club fulfills this task.

Over the past year, HART has referred more than 300 people to jobs at the new Hartford Hospital/Newington Children's Hospital construction project, Stop and Shop supermarket, Meadows Music Amphitheater, and other smaller businesses.

Neighborhood Jobs Center: One-Stop Shopping

The challenge of job placement and job training referral has been further heightened by the relocation of the Department of Labor's Job Center from Washington Street to North Main Street in north Hartford. For years residents from Frog Hollow and south Hartford had been using job services at the Washington Street site, now there is a serious void to job access resulting from this move.

Given this loss of a jobs center from the center of Hartford, HART held several meetings in 1995 with city and state representatives to develop a mini-jobs center in Frog Hollow, and to use the HART Jobs Club as a program on which to build the Center. The HART Jobs Center will be located at 207 Washington Street. The Center will include a joint collaboration between the City, the State Regional

Workforce Development Board, Hartford Hospital, Trinity College, and the Connecticut Puerto Rican Forum -- in concert with the HART Jobs Club program. The Center will also house the State Department of Labor's latest computer technology for job searching. The Jobs Center will include one full time staff person to assist with case management and on-site assistance and referral to the new Jobs Transition Center in north Hartford.

The Department of Labor has also agreed to locate a Job Service kiosk in the Jobs Center building. This kiosk will be primarily self-service, with a computer hook-up that links clients to the region's other job centers. The DOL will provide hardware, software, and lighting for the kiosk. Job Center staff will be on hand to provide intake and assessment, answer specific questions, and train project staff in use of the on-line job referral system.

Work in Hartford, Live in Hartford

In 1995, many of those involved in the above efforts also recognized that more than 75% of the City's several thousand jobs were not going to Hartford residents. Billions of dollars that could stay within the city in taxes and purchasing power are instead circulating in surrounding towns. Should the City require that municipal employees work and live in Hartford?

In December, HART leaders sat down at Camila's restaurant on Park Street with Hartford State Senator Eric Coleman, State Representative Ilia Castro and others to draw up legislation that would give cities permission to require residency for new hires as part of union contracts. Those now living outside of Hartford would not have to move into Hartford. New hires would have to remain in the city for five years, then could choose to stay or move elsewhere.

Months of neighborhood meetings with hundreds of residents pushed this legislation farther than it had ever gone in previous years. Despite support from Mayor Mike Peters and most of Hartford's state delegation, the bill did not survive a vote at the State's Labor Committee.

HART leaders continue to pursue this legislation. Some discussion has centered on meeting with union leadership to gain their support.

Merchants

In all of the neighborhoods where HART organizes, there are hundreds of small businesspeople providing a wide array of goods and services. With a shrinking customer base, increased popularity of suburban shopping malls, and high property taxes, many of these merchants are struggling to survive.

In the spring of 1994 HART helped pull together merchants such as Sue Santilli, Tony Collasacco, and Marie Pellitier from the New Britain Avenue area to begin looking at ways to reclaim the small business district in Hartford's Behind the Rocks and South West areas. There exists tremendous marketing potential with the thousands of Trinity College students and employees, Hartford Hospital, its new annex, as well as the area residents.

In the fall of 1994, the City Planning Department helped craft a master plan for the New Britain Avenue area, including a host of physical improvements and other items aimed at improving business in the area. Funding is being sought to imple-

ment the plan. In December, the group held its first annual Christmas celebration involving more than 300 area residents. Also, with help from Councilman and New Britain Avenue resident John O'Connell, the group has secured more than \$70,000 with which to run promotions and other similar efforts.

Near New Britain Avenue on Zion Street, merchants such as Timothy's Restaurant and College View Cafe and area residents have worked with the City and Trinity College to secure more than \$300,000 to bring about much-needed physical improvements, such as lighting and landscaping, to Rocky Ridge Park. It is also planned that a currently vacant building in the park will soon serve as an office to be used by area merchants, residents, and police.

Late in 1994, a similar effort to build merchant power was launched on Maple Avenue. Leading merchants include Dennis O'Connor and Bruce Johnston. The Maple Avenue Merchant Association (MAMA) have begun meeting with the City to create a development plan for Maple Avenue.

MAMA has joined with residents and other merchant associations to begin plans on how best to allocate a potential \$6 million State fund for commercial development. The Community Development Corporation that will oversee this effort is called the South Hartford Initiative (SHI). HART has assisted with neighborhood elections to the SHI board. HART's experiences with politically controlled funds makes it cautiously hopeful for SHI's success.

Housing

"What good is a good building with bad people? I hope that HART keeps on with organizing and empowerment. Then everything else will flow from that."

—Eddie Perez, Director of Community Relations at Trinity College

With more than 700 vacant buildings and a less-than-effective public housing system, there is a tremendous need to address housing problems. The following provides an overview of other housing-related strategies.

Charter Oak Terrace

Charter Oak Terrace is a low income housing project built in the 1940's as temporary housing for veterans returning from World War II. The dilapidated 1000 housing units still stand in 1995, harboring many of our worst social ills: AIDS, illiteracy, poverty, unemployment, drugs, violent youth gangs, and more.

HART has not organized much in Charter Oak. This is largely due to the deep severity of problems and juggernaut control of residents by gangs, as well as a public housing authority and a 'tenant association' that exert tremendous and not always positive influence over its residents. Also, there is an extremely high turnover of residents, making it difficult to sustain a stable leadership base. Despite these overwhelming challenges, HART has gained some ground in helping residents bring about the drastic improvements so needed in Charter Oak.

David Beckwith recalls one early organizing issue in Charter Oak:

"There were a series of attempts to organize actively in the public housing projects in the late 1970's. I believe it was Charter Oak Terrace,

where they had a rat problem, and they had a rat killing exercise, where they put garden hoses down the holes, and the rats would stick their heads up out of the other holes, they'd slam them with a baseball bat. They were hoping to make this work one time for the TV cameras. It worked so well that it became a blood bath. It was really amazing. Kids would all go grab bats and sticks and beat the rats. It was very, very dramatic. And it made the point very dramatically that rats were not being efficiently eradicated. It was on TV. It was in the newspapers. It was a good hit. [laughs] Ouch!" [203]

With prodding from residents Keith Henderson, Jackie Fongemie, Rosa Morales, Flora Long and others, HART hired two full-time organizers to organize in Charter Oak Terrace in 1994. On the anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday in January, there was a march of forty residents in a driving snowstorm to meet with the Hartford Housing Authority about some basic improvement issues. Throughout the following summer, HART brought together hundreds of residents in response to a wave of drive-by shootings that riddled Charter Oak.

Another early success was captured in an article written by Charter Oak residents Luz Arroyo and Joanne Fulk:

"On February 2, 1994, one hundred concerned Charter Oak residents met to discuss the possible centralizing of our mail delivery. At this meeting we invited a representative from the post office to come and discuss this matter with us. Unfortunately for the post office, no one showed up. This made residents very angry.

"The next day we took seventy-five people to the post office, where we were met by the postal police. This did not stop us. We went right in and demanded to be heard. After talking with the postal manager and the Hartford Housing Authority, we won our right to keep door-to-door delivery."

In October 1994, HART hosted a meeting with the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Assistant Secretary for Public and Indian Housing Joseph Shuldiner. Near that time it was announced that the 'D-side' of Charter Oak would receive more than \$19 million to totally demolish and then rebuild a portion of the 266 units.

Six months later HART secured a meeting with HUD Secretary Henry Cisneros in Washington. The trip was made by HART's Jackie Fongemie, David Martinez, and Jackie Velez. They were accompanied by Mayor Mike Peters, Hartford Housing Authority Director John Wardlaw, Congresswoman Barbara Kennelly, and others. Cisneros and his staff committed to supporting Hartford's work to revitalize its public housing. In

Charter Oak resident protests post office plan to centralize mail delivery.



July 1995, a \$20 million request for funding was submitted by the Housing Authority to HUD to rebuild the 700 unit 'A/B/C' section of Charter Oak Terrace. Cisneros, at the invitation of HART, came to Hartford in September 1995 and vowed to use 'all the power at his disposal' to fund the request for the A/B/C portion of Charter Oak. On October 9, Cisneros returned to Hartford and announced that Charter Oak's ABC side would receive more than \$21 million for complete revitalization. In his remarks to a packed YMCA gym, Cisneros said, "We have the opportunity to do something that hasn't been done anywhere in the United States of America. HUD had to support this effort worked on so hard by so many people."

In 1995, organizing in Charter Oak Terrace remains especially challenging. It is hoped that HART's access to significant power players in Connecticut and Washington and on-going maintenance of a relationship between Charter Oak and the surrounding Behind the Rocks neighborhood group will help attract and use the resources needed to bring about necessary changes.



HUD secretary Henry Cisneros with HART's Jackie Fongemie on a September 1995 tour of Charter Oak Terrace.

HOME and Housing Revitalization Off-spring

Beyond enhancing and expanding HART's wildly successful Home Ownership Made Easy (HOME), HART has begun to explore other key housing related issues.

Housing 'Turn-Key' Program

HART, with vital support from Trinity College, recently piloted a 'hard development' program that has proven to be a major success. The organization purchased and completely renovated a vacant three-family home on Lincoln Street, which was then sold to a Frog Hollow resident at cost, for \$92,000. HART is planning to renovate eight additional vacant two- and three-family homes on Madison and Lincoln Streets to make available for homebuyers through HART's HOME program in 1996.

Landlord and Tenant Assistance

In 1996, HART will provide services to assist landlords in maintaining and operating their buildings. HART will build a data base of quality tenants, assist land-

lords in finding funds to renovate their buildings, organize efforts to advertise for tenants and run workshops on landlord and tenant cooperation, responsibilities, and obligations.

Housing Revitalization

HART is also pressing forward with neighborhood housing plans to revitalize vacant and abandoned properties. In Frog Hollow, residents in the Broad Street corridor are working to get an eight building project called 'Broad-Gate' off the ground. If this is not feasible, demolition of the properties will be sought.

In the Morton-Putnam Heights area, near Pope Park and Burns School, area residents are working with Broad Park Development on a multi-property rehabilitation project of fourteen vacant buildings. Nearby on Zion Street, Frog Hollow and Behind the Rocks residents are working with Mutual Housing, Affordable Housing, Inc., Trinity College, El Hogar del Futuro and others on additional redevelopment projects.

On Lawrence Street, in the area of Maria Sanchez School, a \$7 million plan has been crafted for the two dozen buildings on this street. Led by HART's Jackie Velez and Jose Martinez, the plan includes demolition, green space, and rehabilitation by the City, non-profit developers and others.

In the Barry Square neighborhood, residents are in the process of targeting North Barry Square, where twenty abandoned buildings are located.

With the August 1995 targeting of FANNIE MAE mortgage program to Frog Hollow and Barry Square and the development of State Neighborhood Revitalization Zones, HART is hopeful that significant resources can be brought together to rebuild several distressed communities. Along with the housing strategies, HART will advance issues related to property tax reform, crime, and quality of schools to support the communities in which this housing stands.

Other HART Community Revitalization Activities

Police Corruption

In November 1994 Judge Arthur Spada issued a shocking report on wide-spread police abuses within the Hartford Police Department. In response, residents pushed for several initiatives to prevent similar problems down the road.

One item was to create a separate bargaining unit for police supervisors. It was felt that supervisors could not adequately discipline line officers who were in the very same union. After several meetings with more than one hundred people, the bill could not muster the needed support of the State Legislature's Labor committee. According to reliable sources, the bill failed because of aggressive lobbying by State Representative Edwin Garcia.

This is HART's first involvement in what are essentially problems between the police union and management. Despite the wide-spread publicity and attention generated by this campaign, the police department has not yet implemented the structural changes needed to fully rebuild trust with community residents. Resident leadership has continued to promote neighborhood policing in other ways, such as pushing for the timely recruiting of police training classes, maintenance of the Community Service Officer program, and other items to be negotiated through an upcoming police union contract.

Comprehensive Community Partnership

With the success of the Frog Hollow Revitalization Committee and its application in the Barry Square and Behind the Rocks/South West neighborhoods, the City supported the expansion of that organizing model to other Hartford communities. With support from UCAN, HART and other groups, a \$2.2 million grant from the Department of Justice was awarded to Hartford in 1995.

Over time it is planned that all seventeen city neighborhoods will employ one of HART's primary approaches to community revitalization: periodic accountability meetings between residents and key city officials. It remains to be seen if the City will fully embrace this approach to neighborhood problem solving or if this a short-term realignment designed to meet Federal grant requirements.

HART Yesterday and Tomorrow

On June 28, 1995, HART community leaders announced plans for the '20th HART Congress'. More than 150 people attended the celebration, including past HART presidents Alta Lash, Jackie Fongemie, David Martinez, Dulcie Giadone, and Peg Stewart. Politicians Nick Carbone, John O'Connell, Marie Kirkley-Bey were among the throng of guests.

As with the announcement of the first HART Congress twenty years earlier, HART took action. Following the celebration, fifty people loaded up in cars and paid a visit to the apartment of State Representative, Hartford Police Officer, and neighborhood nemesis Edwin Garcia. Residents demanded that he resign due to numerous assaults on community initiatives, including opposition to several crucial pieces of legislation involving police corruption, city employee 'residency requirement', and funding for youth alternatives. Garcia did not resign, and has since threatened HART with a lawsuit.

As HART completes its twentieth year, it gives cause to reflect and assess its progress and possibilities. The stories compiled in this publication suggest a number of important themes on which to build the next twenty years.

HART has had a great deal to do with advancing public policy issues related to property taxes, education, housing, community policing, downtown development, youth development, neighborhood revitalization, and economic development. Strolling the streets of HART neighborhoods one can point to significant improvements: one to three family homes still intact; youth centers providing constructive activities; increased home ownership; new schools; community service officers, neighborhood police patrols and community police 'sub-stations'; increased after-school programming; new job strategies and a job center; more responsive city services; private sector developers respecting neighborhood development plans, and much, much more.

Despite these major inroads, Hartford remains a city in trouble. In 1995, the City was the eighth poorest per capita in the country. Along with a major real estate collapse, bank failures and mega-mergers, 'downsizing' of the locally important insurance and defense industries, and still active gang recruitment and smoldering violence, many have thrown up their hands in despair. But throughout this period, HART has built hope and brought about major improvements. The future will no doubt be filled with challenge, but HART must push for continued community revival and progress. What key questions will HART and Hartford face as we enter the next century?

- with significant tax-exempt properties in Hartford, can meaningful **property tax reform** be achieved to reduce the burden on residential and small business properties?
- will **community policing** become a viable police function that builds trust, safety and problem solving between residents and the police department, or will it deteriorate to a point where it acts only as a fashionable facade for the city to attract federal and state funds?
- will **school reform** result in increased parental participation, fairer distribution of educational resources to Hartford school children, and increases in educational performance?
- will Hartford's **housing stock** become more owner-occupied with more stable property values, or will investors and greedy real estate firms profit off the low property values resulting in more resident turnover and decline of property condition?
- will **economic development** plans for Hartford increase the property tax base and provide training and jobs for capable Hartford residents, or will Hartford continue providing employment to primarily non-Hartford residents, leaving Hartford jobless and bankrupt?

These will certainly be a few of the questions that HART will grapple with in the coming years. Will Hartford's elected officials, civil servants and other interests be up to the challenge to confront these issues as well?

As important as these public policy questions are, **community building** is as important. HART neighborhoods have roughed a sea of change over the past several decades. According to recent census data, over 60% of Hartford residents who were here twenty years ago are no longer in the city. Hartford schools and churches mirror this trend of neighborhood transition. Casual observation suggests that this trend continues, as 'For Sale' signs dot the city landscape. While the public policy issues mentioned above can fuel discontent and foster flight from Hartford, remaining residents and those moving to the city are often faced with feelings of isolation. They are strangers in their own communities. Many become so disenfranchised from important neighborhood institutions that they have a greater difficulty understanding how to best deal with local community problems.

HART's history has been one where people from diverse backgrounds interact with one another because of common issues. This has and will continue to serve as a basis to rebuild community. People who were once strangers on their own blocks form relationships with one another on a common issue, and then begin to build bonds of community. Meetings of one's street, neighborhood, school, and church have proved especially critical to helping residents transcend the increasing isolation that people can feel.

If HART is to be successful tomorrow, it must continue blending public policy issues in the venue of community building. Twenty years ago an enthusiastic group of urban pioneers came together with this goal in mind. They crafted an active

vision of helping Hartford residents by building hope, community and power to create their own futures for their neighborhoods. It is clear that the next twenty years will need that same kind of community involvement to ensure the revitalization of Hartford's economic, social and political viability. If we remember and apply any of the many messages contained within this collection of stories, it must be that reclaiming our streets, neighborhoods and cities will come not through isolation, but in community.

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